

Nurse's Aide

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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Christmas Gift
Nurse In White
Gay Pretending
The Shorn Lamb
Nurses Are People
Meet the Warrens
Brown Honey
North Side Nurse
Pat Whitney, R.N.
West End Nurse
Staff Nurse

NURSE'S AIDE

by

Lucy Agnes Hancock



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To
LAURA KATHERINE SMITH
STUDENT NURSE—SOON TO BE AN R.N.
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

Nurse's Aide

THE LONG WOMEN'S SURGICAL IN GOOD SAMARITAN Hospital was experiencing its five o'clock restlessness. Afternoon visitors had made their leisurely departure, leaving in their wake excitement, wistfulness, homesickness, weariness or eagerness to be out of bed and away as the case might be. The attending nurse sagged a little, her uniform had lost its early-morning freshness. Smiles were a bit automatic and white-shod feet lagged. A girl in the blue and white of a Nurse's Aide came briskly along the corridor and paused beside the table outside the entrance to the ward. Ruth McClusky gave a sigh of relief.

"You're a direct answer to prayer, Stuart," she exclaimed fervently. "I'm dead on my feet."

The newcomer smiled. "You look it. All alone up here?"

The nurse nodded. "Mather had a hurry call to Emergency."

"I hadn't the faintest idea there was so much linen in the whole world as the amount we stowed away in the linen room this afternoon," Penny Stuart sighed. "I like working among the patients better, though of course I know all that other has to be done."

"Good girl!" the nurse murmured.

"Anything special you want me to do?"

"Plenty. Mrs. Murella's bed has to be changed

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again—it's the fourth time today. Mrs. Hart went home so there's hers to wash and make up. Take another pillow to old lady Marsh—her back's bothering her—or so she says, and give Miss Broski an ice bag—too much company. But try to keep 'em out. This afternoon has been just about the limit. By the time you've done those few little things you can go up to the X-ray room and see if Mrs. Hemming is ready to be brought back. Mather took her up there but couldn't wait for her. Oh, there's a lot of things you can find to keep you busy until I'm through here. Then I'll be with you. We have a new batch of girls just starting and you can help a great deal there—sort of be a bright and shining example. So better be on your toes tomorrow, my dear." She smiled wanly. "I'll finish these charts and help you with the trays."

As she went about her duties, Penny Stuart felt a surge of well-being. It was good to be of use—to be needed, to have patients watch for her and greet her as if they loved having her wait on them. How scared she had been at first! She who never in her life had made a bed was now an expert bed-maker. Bathing patients had been, perhaps, the hardest part of her job; but that, too, she had learned to do easily and satisfactorily, even pleasing the supervisor. She kept her own notebook in a businesslike way and was an adept at taking temperatures, pulse and respiration. Louise had jibed that she had degenerated to the position of chamber-maid—a mere drudge to satisfy

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the ego of the nurses; but Penny knew she was far more than that. She was beginning to feel practically indispensable and it was a grand and glorious sensation.

Penny had never been especially easy to contact, being by nature reserved and quiet, almost shy, so she had made few friends among the other aides; but one day as she was leaving the hospital, she had come upon a girl of about her own age leaning against one of the huge pillars that supported the entrance, reading a letter while tears poured down her cheeks. The girl looked up as Penny paused beside her, undecided whether to offer her services, and the smile that lightened her face was like a sudden rainbow. She pressed the letter to her breast.

"Mac has landed safely in Africa!" she whispered, dashing a hand across her wet eyes.

"And you are relieved and happy about it?" Penny asked, feeling in duty bound to say something.

"So terribly happy! You see, the transport he was on was given up for lost—and—but I never gave up," she choked. "I knew he would get through somehow. Isn't it wonderful?" She raised luminous brown eyes to Penny's face, and Penny muttered bitterly:

"Oh, what's the use of it all?" And again she uttered the words that had amused Nick all those months ago. Was it only five? It seemed a lifetime away. "I hate this war!" She said it aloud as she

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stood there on the hospital steps staring bleakly into space.

"But of course," the girl agreed. "We all do. Have you someone across? Husband—no, of course not. Brother, perhaps, or sweetheart?"

Penny shook her head. "I know men who have gone but none who are related to me—even romantically. Is Mac your sweetheart?"

"My husband," the girl said proudly. "We were married two days before his boat sailed. I'm glad we did it. At least we had that little time together."

"But you're very young to be married ——" Penny ventured, forgetting that not so long ago she had felt herself quite old enough to become Barton Ames' wife.

"I know; but you see, Mac and I were engaged for months."

"O-oh," Penny said as if that explained everything.

"What is your last name, Mrs. ——"

"Dean, Louella Dean. I work mornings in Olsen's bakery but my afternoons are free so I thought I'd come over here and help. It seems as if I'm helping Mac—helping with the war. Don't you feel that way? I know your name. You're Penelope Stuart from over on Chestnut Place. I've admired you a great deal ——"

"Admired me! You have?" Penny exclaimed in honest surprise. "But why?"

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"As if you didn't know," the other chided. And as Penny shook her head in bewilderment that anyone should especially admire her, Louella went on: "You're so beautiful—so—you always know just what to do. I guess you have about everything you want and ——"

"Oh, no I haven't," Penny cried involuntarily. Then quickly as she noted the other's look of inquiry, "Who has in this sorry world?"

"Well, some have more than others," the girl said simply, "and you *seem* to have everything."

"Don't jump to conclusions, Mrs. Dean," Penny advised.

"Call me Lou—everyone does and honestly I'm still not used to the name of Dean. You see, I was Louella Brooks before I married. Do you like it—the work here? Don't you find it hard?"

"Of course," Penny replied. "But who minds that? The thing I like about it is knowing I'm being of use—at last."

She added the two words almost absently and Mrs. Dean forbore comment. She slipped her precious letter into her bag and walked on down the hospital steps, Penny following more slowly.

"Which way do you go?" Penny asked when they reached the street.

"Just over on Third for a bite to eat and then I'm coming back to work three hours longer. I've had

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my cap two months and I've already earned one stripe on my bib. Isn't it thrilling? I'm so proud!"

"But how many hours a day do you put in?" Penny wanted to know.

"Seven—usually. You see, I go to work at the bakery at six in the morning and work until twelve. But please don't mention it. Someone might object though I don't see why. That leaves my afternoon free so I give the hospital four hours in the afternoon and three in the evening."

"But that's a terribly long day," Penny demurred. "Thirteen hours. And you don't look very strong either. Ought you do it?"

Louella laughed merrily. "My looks are deceptive, Miss—Penny," she corrected at the other's quick headshake. "To think of me—plain Louella Brooks—calling *you* by your pet name! You're sweet, Penny. I like you. But I'm strong—haven't been sick in don't know when. And, you see, my people live in Kansas. I have a room here at the Y. W. and I might just as well be doing this as sitting around in my room moping. Better. Mac's doing a full-time job for me, you know. Why shouldn't I do as much for him? I was so thrilled when they accepted me at the hospital! I remember the first day I went on duty. My boss had given me the whole day off and I was so eager to get started that I reported for duty at seven o'clock. Imagine! Crazy? Maybe, but I just couldn't help it. Anyway, the nurses were mighty glad

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to see me. My uniform was new and very becoming—at least I thought so. I had had a shampoo and hair-do just the night before and that morning I felt on top of the world—so happy and important. I walked down the Women's Medical carrying a tray filled with glasses of orange juice and I saw myself as another Florence Nightingale. Suddenly, up piped a small voice from the end of the room and brought me down to earth with a dull thud." She giggled reminiscently. "'Please, I want the bed pan.'"

Penny joined in the merry laugh that followed. She had experienced much the same reaction except that she had never dramatized herself. She was doing aide work simply to prove to herself that she was not useless—incapable of constructive work. She had never desired to have any part in war work—she wanted nothing to do with it. She simply desired to atone in some small measure for the havoc it had wrought in Wellsport.

"But I like the work just the same," Louella went on, "and I'm glad I can do it."

"Well, I'm glad of one thing," Penny said earnestly. "I'm glad we are far enough from the coast so we don't get sailors or soldiers here. I'm glad we have only civilians to take care of."

"Why do you say that?" Louella asked curiously. "Don't you like sailors and soldiers? But _____"

"Oh, it isn't that," Penny said hastily. "It's just

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that I hate this whole thing so terribly that I don't think I could stand having it come any closer."

Louella laughed.

"You're funny," she said mildly. Her pace had slackened. Now she stopped. "Here's where I leave you. I eat at a tiny cafeteria over on Third. 'Bye, Penny. See you tomorrow."

Penny walked home, her thoughts wandering. Ruth McClusky had told her that of the thirty-odd girls and women acting as aides in Good Samaritan, twenty-five were directly connected with the war, that is, twenty-five had either husbands, sons, brothers or sweethearts in the service. The other five or six were helping because they felt the need was vital, and Penny, who was carrying a torch for a man who was engaged to another girl, was doing it for the simple reason that she wanted to prove herself no parasite. Of course there was Nick Marshall; but she didn't want Nick to be in love with her. She wanted Bart, and Bart was engaged to her cousin, Louise Sabin.

Penny recalled the morning the engagement had been announced in the *Wellsport Morning Courier* and her mother's surprise—almost annoyance—that it was supposed to be she, the prospective bride's aunt, who had made the announcement.

"She might at least have shown me the courtesy of asking my consent before going ahead like that," her mother had sputtered at the breakfast table as

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she laid down the paper. "I must say, Louise takes a great deal for granted."

"You said it!" Sarah declared impulsively and Penny had giggled at her mother's sudden look of shock. Sarah had fled and Mrs. Stuart turned reprovingly to her daughter.

"Sometimes Sarah says very strange things, Penny," she said, her fine brows drawn together in a frown. "The idea of her making a remark like that."

"Well," Penny replied demurely, "Sarah isn't exactly crazy about dear Louise, Mother darling. Louise high-hats her."

"You mean she snubs her?"

"That's the general idea," Penny agreed.

"But that's ill-bred, my dear. One doesn't snub one's maids. It just isn't done —"

"Except by Louise, who, you must confess, is a law unto herself."

Penny wondered how Louise could act so complaisant—so serene—as if Bart were not in constant danger. Why, she was even going about with Alan Lowell again just as if nothing had happened—as if she weren't wearing Bart's ring. Penny wondered how Bart had found time to buy that ring. He must have had it for some time. Sarah insisted she had her doubts about his giving it to her. But, of course, Louise wouldn't say the ring was his if it wasn't—or would she? Penny didn't know. Anyway, she had written a brief note to Bart, congratulating him, and

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enclosed it in one of Louise's letters to him. She felt she could do no less. Bart had never mentioned it. But then he had always persisted in treating her as if she were still a child—darn him!

She quickened her steps and turned into Chestnut Drive in time to see her cousin's shining coupé leave the curb in front of the Stuart house. Only Mr. Lowell's car remained parked in the drive. Uncle Stephen always had tea with her mother on Wednesdays. Penny ran up the steps and let herself in with her latchkey.

"Come in, dear," her mother called softly. "Stephen saw you come down the street. Have you had a hard day, darling? Sometimes I regret giving my permission for you to go into this work. Louise feels it would be so much better if you would help at the Canteen or Red Cross. She has been telling me some of the things you are supposed to do there in the wards and—really, Penny darling, I'm shocked ——"

Penny laughed but without mirth. It was none of Louise Sabin's business what she did with her time. She wished she would confine her concern to her own affairs and let her alone. "Don't be silly, Mother," she smiled and patted her mother's shoulder. "I love hospital work. It's hard, of course. Anything that's really worth while is hard; but I'm not killing myself. You see, I have been storing up a lot of energy during my years of loafing and now I'm spend-

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ing it where it will do the most good. Tell Cousin Louise to roll her own hoop and leave me to roll mine. She's altogether too bossy."

Stephen Lowell nodded vigorously. "I quite agree with our Penny, Adelaide. Louise has a most dictatorial manner—one that I deplore. Alan laughs at her for trying to manage the entire enterprise; but I'm sure it annoys him greatly. A man likes to do—well, most men abhor managing women. I know I do. I flee from them as from the plague." He laughed and his face flushed. Penny wondered at his vehemence.

"Louise is somewhat insistent," Mrs. Stuart said musingly. "But you speak of Louise and Alan, Stephen—together, as if——"

"Oh, now that Louise is formally engaged, Alan is back at the old shrine. It's quite safe, you see." He gave a little laugh, almost shamefaced, Penny thought. "You see, Adelaide, he and Louise quarrel a great deal but somehow the boy seems to go back for more. However, I'm relieved that nothing can develop from this association—now. It would be a most unfortunate alliance, I'm sure. Not but what Louise is a beautiful, talented and very capable girl. I'm sure she is all of those things; but she is not for Alan. He is all I have, you know, Adelaide; and I want him to have a happy and successful marriage. I'm quite sure it would be neither one nor the other if he married Louise Sabin. Pardon my being so out-

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spoken, my dear," he went on apologetically, "but I'm sure you quite understand how I feel."

Penny slipped away and she doubted if the two absorbed people before the fire noticed her departure. She had begun to wonder what her mother and Uncle Stephen were waiting for. He was an old dear—not so old either—not much older than her father would have been had he lived. Her heart caught. Precious Daddy! So dear and understanding. She never had to explain things to him. He sympathized with her shyness—her innate dread of meeting strangers. He would talk to her—explain how he had overcome his own shortcomings and had insisted that she must not be hurried. He had died when Penny was fourteen, just beginning to overcome and outgrow the frailties that had kept her a semi-invalid from babyhood. As she mounted the stairs to her room this afternoon, she knew an intense longing for her beloved father. A yearning to feel his strong arms about her and to bury her tired head in his comforting shoulder.

Sarah was mending the fire in the gay, chintz-hung room when Penny reached it and tossed hat, coat and gloves on the nearest chair. She slumped to the floor before the flaming wood in the grate.

"Grand, Sarah!" she exclaimed, hugging her knees and staring at the fire. "You certainly know how to kindle a flame, my good woman. Were you ever a Girl Scout, by any chance?"

"You know right well I was never no Girl Scout,

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Miss Penny," the maid answered tolerantly. "They didn't have such things when I was a girl. I helped Pa on the farm and Ma in the kitchen from the time I was knee-high to a grasshopper 'til I come to your ma when she got married to your pa. Kids worked in my day, and it's my personal opinion they'd be a whole sight better if they had to now instead of going to movies, running the streets and traipsing all over creation dressed up in fancy duds and calling themselves Girl Scouts. Work never hurt nobody. Running around loose has hurt plenty."

"Why the grouch, darling?" Penny asked negligently, leaning back against a chair and stretching luxuriously. "Who stepped on your favorite corn or otherwise hurt your feelings?"

"I ain't got no corns, Penny Stuart, and as for my feelings, I ain't supposed to have none."

"Tell Penny," crooned the girl softly, reaching a hand to the morose woman and urging her into the chair against which she leaned.

"Oh, it ain't nothing worth mentioning, I suppose," Sarah muttered darkly. "But I heard that one—oh, yes, she was here this afternoon—stayed more'n an hour—complaining that she needed your help at the party she's planning for this Sat'dy and filling your ma's head with a lot of wild tales about all the things you have to do at that hospital. Not that I hold with your working yourself to skin and bone, Miss Penny; but what business is it of hers?"

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Tell me that. I saw through her—the—the whited supplecree! Here, Miss Penny. I saw she had her eye on this and I took it to keep 'til you got home."

"A letter!" Penny cried, her gray eyes darkening with excitement. "It's from Bart." She tried to smother the glow in her eyes and still the sudden trembling that shook her slender body. "Thank you, Sarah," she murmured and laid it on the floor beside her, not to be read until she was alone.

As if sensing her desire, Sarah moved toward the door. "Like as not she'd o' swiped that letter and you'd never got so much as a glimpse of it."

If Penny heard she gave no sign for she was already slipping the letter from the envelope. Her eye ran down the closely written sheets. The usual letter. Not a word about his engagement—scarcely a word of Louise—just repeating the warning not to let her spoil his girl for him. "That's my prerogative, darling, and mine alone."

Penny smiled dreamily, then stiffened. He shouldn't say such things to her. But of course, she reasoned ruefully, he considered her just a child. She stood up abruptly and walked to her desk where she slipped the letter into a secret drawer. How could a man make love to one girl—for it certainly looked very much like love to her—while he was engaged to another? Well, she would continue to keep her own letters strictly impersonal. She would finish the letter she had begun to Nick before she wrote to Bart

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again. Somehow she experienced a let-down feeling. She was sure she would like it better if he came out boldly and mentioned his engagement to Louise. It looked almost as if he were two-timing Louise or as if he considered Penny too stupid to understand. She bit her lip and quickly banished the thought. Bart was Bart—he could do no wrong, or at least not very wrong.

"SWEET AND LOVELY—DEFINITELY ORNAMENTAL, but, I assure you, quite useless," was the consensus of opinion regarding twenty-year-old Penelope Stuart, and, until the unhappy October afternoon when her air castles came tumbling about her pretty ears, it bothered her not at all. She was honestly indifferent to what her world thought of her. She went on her serene, unruffled way quite blind and deaf to the turmoil about her or the excited activity of her contemporaries—especially that of her cousin, Louise Sabin.

Fortunately, her widowed mother and the adoring servants found that Penny's wishes and pleasures more often than not coincided with their own so that everything was just about perfect in the Stuart menage, or was until that October afternoon.

The change, when it came, was abrupt and drastic and Penny blamed it all on this terrible and quite unreasonable war. She hated everything pertaining to this war—the upsetting of her smooth-running life; the vanishing of people she had been used to seeing from day to day—gone to work in munition plants, she was told. The big old house was now staffed by two where once five people were required to keep everything running smoothly. The two left were over-

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age, she was informed, or they, too, would have departed. She hated the uniforms that changed mischievous fun-loving youngsters into serious, sober-faced men. Especially she hated the enlisting of her own particular heart-interest, Doctor Barton Ames. Why, she had always intended marrying Bart when he should have finished his medical training. It wasn't fair nor right! Suddenly her whole life turned flat, dull and worthless. The future stretched ahead endlessly—drab, bleak and lonely. At last, in self-defense and to the dismay of her household, she made a complete about face and declared she was going to get a job—something that had nothing to do with this horrible war—something that would offset, at least in some small measure, the havoc it was making right here in Wellsport; she would be a Nurse's Aide!

Perhaps no one ever realized just what Penny Stuart endured those first few weeks of training. Many a time she faltered and was tempted to quit—go back to the lazy, easy life she had once found so satisfying; but some unsuspected iron in her soul kept her on the job and now with her cap safely earned and her reputation well established, she recalled with shame and regret the title she had worn almost complacently: "Sweet and lovely—definitely ornamental but quite useless—that's Penelope Stuart."

She recalled that it was quite cool for early October and there was a bright fire burning on the hearth in

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the pleasant library where she sat impatiently awaiting one of Bart's rare and, recently, brief visits. Louise had entered looking for all the world like a model for next year's well-dressed young woman. Her amazing blond beauty was intensified by the luxurious fur coat she wore and the tiny, smart hat perched atop the softly waving hair gave her a provocative air. Louise refused to get into a uniform—she wished to remain purely feminine, or so she said. Penny admired her even while the old feeling of dislike and distrust returned every time she came in contact with her. Now she sensed the disdain with which her lovely cousin eyed her and shook her head slowly from side to side in anticipation of the caller's pending request. Louise remained standing.

" Honestly, Penny Stuart, I believe you're absolutely the most useless creature ever created. Don't you realize there's a war on? Don't you know or care that our boys are dying on battlefields in order to protect your—your worthless neck? "

" Heavens, Louise! " Penny drawled in the manner she knew to be most annoying to her cousin. " Why all the heroics? I'm sure I didn't ask any of them to go, much less to protect me, and I assure you my neck is far from worthless, at least to me. Fact is, I rather like my neck, Louise. It's slender and—and quite nice—I've been told." Suddenly she stiffened. " Now you listen to me for a change, my dear cousin. I don't choose to go in for Red Cross or Canteen

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work either. I don't choose to dance with a lot of boys I never saw before—in the name of patriotism. You can do as you like. You enjoy playing to the gallery—oh, yes you do, darling. If you didn't like all this hectic war work you wouldn't get mixed up in it. Anyway, there's no one I care two buttons for in this war so why should I get all hot and bothered about it? If you get fun out of it that's your affair—not mine."

"How about Bart?" Louise asked, meaningly. "He has enlisted, been accepted and is going with the St. Luke Hospital Unit. I believe he's a First Lieutenant."

"Oh, I know that; but he's a surgeon—or almost a surgeon. And that's different," Penny reminded her. "He'll be all right and I'm sure Bart would be the last person in the world to advise my running myself ragged doing perfectly inane things for a lot of boys just because they happen to be in uniform. Anyway, I'm not interested."

"You make me sick!" her cousin stormed. "How can you be so callous when we need help so badly——"

"We?" Penny asked. "Just who might 'we' be?"

"I've been telling you. The Red Cross, the Canteen and all of us who are trying to preserve the morale of our boys at Camp Charles by helping entertain them with good, healthful amusements. You

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could be a grand help, Penny, if you would only forget yourself. You could do a lot at the Saturday night parties and have fun, too."

"No, thank you," Penny yawned. "I absolutely refuse to get mixed up in this mess, Louise. You can have it all—every bit of it—and may the halo you'll acquire for good works compensate for the fallen arches, ruined frocks and morning-after headaches you'll gather on the way." She said it bitterly—not believing a word of it; but Louise affected her that way. Hadn't she watched her at parties—watched the admiring males surround her? Hadn't she endured the humiliation of having her cousin drag a poor protesting satellite over to her shy little relative with the injunction that he must do his duty by the other girls? Hadn't she tasted the bitterness of defeat as the young man "did his duty by her," then when the dance was over fled back to Louise? Hadn't she seen her lovely cousin shake her head in helplessness and pat the returning hero on the arm? Perhaps she should not blame Louise for her own inadequacy but she knew she could never be herself—her best self—in Louise's company.

"You're quite hopeless," Louise said sharply, "and absolutely the most selfish person I have ever come across. I don't see how Aunt Adelaide stands it. I don't believe you have ever done a worth-while thing in your whole life—made a single sacrifice ——"

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"Stop abusing my girl, Louise Sabin."

Penny left her seat and ran to clasp the arm of Barton Ames who had entered unobserved. He patted her hand and grinned down at her.

"I don't mind her," Penny assured him. "Just now Louise fancies herself in the rôle of crusader. She's mad because I'm not having any, thank you."

Louise said nothing. Her blue eyes were veiled and she stood for a moment as if uncertain whether to leave the room or stay. Penny decided for her.

"Why don't you run up and see Mother, Louise?" she suggested, hoping her cousin would have the good sense to realize she wanted to have Bart to herself. "She must be awake by this time and will wonder if you go without seeing her. Come over to the fire, Bart. It's cold outside, isn't it?"

Louise Sabin took the hint and Penny sank down on a low stool beside Bart's chair. The afternoon sun streaming through the west windows made a halo of the girl's dusky hair, bringing out warm lights that always surprised people who thought of her hair as almost black. Her face was amazingly sweet with its warm, creamy complexion and dark gray eyes. The thick black lashes made fascinating shadows above her softly rounded cheeks. Now her mouth was pensive as she stared into the leaping flames.

"Why was Louise ragging you, darling?" Barton Ames asked, touching with gentle, almost paternal fingers the soft hair so close to his knee.

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Penny laughed naughtily. "Louise is suffering from an overdose of patriotism," she explained. "Honestly, Bart, it tires me just listening to her rave about all her manifold activities in the name of good citizenship—Americanism. Why, I'm buying war bonds, Bart. I must have several thousand dollars' worth, I don't know exactly how much. Mother takes care of that for me. I guess I'm as patriotic as Louise is—only I don't talk so much about it. It's sort of like religion—too deep and sacred for ordinary conversation."

The young man laughed and ruffled her hair. "I bet you read that somewhere, Penelope Stuart," he teased. "You never thought of it all by yourself. By the way, how are you these days? Heart behaving all right? No more fainting spells?"

"Oh, I'm quite husky now, Bart," the girl assured him.

"Husky!" Louise Sabin echoed reentering the room. "Why the girl's an Amazon when it comes to endurance, Bart. Skate or ski all day—with her own particular pals, if any, and could dance all night if she wanted to with never a skip in the pulse. She has more stamina than even I have."

"So what?" Penny asked, annoyed at her cousin's return.

"So nothing, only it seems rather amazing when one remembers the long years of invalidism—or was it something else?"

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"I was never an invalid, Louise Sabin," Penny countered indignantly. "I was just frail and just what do you mean by that last crack? 'Something else'—what does that mean? I'll have you know I'm well—perfectly well now and I mean to stay well—by taking care of myself." Her gray eyes smoldered. Why did Louise always put her in the wrong? Why did she seem to take delight in baiting her? She caught Bart's hand and her anger faded.

As Louise reached the door on her way out with the gloves she had returned to gather up, she said softly: "I suppose, after all, you are still a child—too young and too unawakened to know what it's all about. You're to be pitied rather than censured."

She went out and the street door closed before Penny spoke again. "Do you know, Bart," she said aggrievedly, "sometimes Louise makes me so mad I could—could slap her. Why does she make me feel like something that has just crawled out from under a stone?"

"You're too sensitive, darling," the young man said soothingly. "Why don't you stand up to her? I doubt if she actually means to censure you, Penny. Anyway, why should she?"

"That's just it," the girl muttered. "What right has she? After all she's only my cousin." She sighed dolefully. "It's because she's so tall and distinguished looking. She just naturally takes what she wants. And

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just because she enjoys all this flag waving and hurrahing she expects everyone else to do likewise."

"I don't think it's so much that she enjoys it exactly, Penny," Bart mused, "as it is that she's possessed of a zeal for helping wherever she can. They tell me she can get more out of her aides than any woman in town. They would do anything for her ——"

"Let 'em," Penny snapped. "I'm not going to. Don't let's talk about her, Bart," she pleaded. "Tell me when you are leaving and just where you'll be stationed. I hope it will be near—they have to have surgeons in this country, don't they?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, infant," Bart told her and rose to greet Mrs. Stuart who entered the room and held out both hands in welcome.

"My dear boy," she murmured, "how nice to see you again! We must make the most of these visits, I suppose, now that you will be leaving us so soon. We shall miss you, Bart."

"But he may not be going far, Mother," Penny reminded her. "I wish you and Louise wouldn't insist on always taking such a gloomy view of everything. We have to have surgeons in our camps here, don't we? How do you know Bart will be sent overseas?"

"Why—why—I just thought—we sort of imagine ——"

"That's just it. Imagination—morbidness. I'm going out to see what Maggie's planning for dinner.

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She'll turn the cupboards inside out for Bart. Of course you're staying for dinner, darling?" she said over her shoulder as she slipped out of the room. She didn't hear his regrets or see him when he went down the hall to the kitchen in search of her. She had gone to her room to change into the frock Bart had always liked—a soft gray-blue wool with orange pipings.

Three weeks later she was dressing carefully for Bart's good-bye visit. He was leaving for the West Coast immediately. Penny hadn't seen him during the whole three weeks although he had telephoned her a half-dozen times and sent her a box of her favorite yellow roses on her birthday. The card accompanying the flowers was as sentimental as even a twenty-year-old girl could have wished and Penny's heart glowed as she read it, then hid it from inquisitive eyes. Sarah had a way of finding out things, and the message on that card was too precious—too sacred for even her loving gaze. On this afternoon, Penny stood before the long mirror in her bedroom and smiled happily at her reflection. She was glad she was pretty, that her eyes were gray and black-lashed, that her nose and mouth were good and her teeth and complexion all that could be desired. She glanced down her length and the smile left her eyes. She sighed wistfully. She wished she were taller—like Cousin Louise, for instance.

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Penny was barely five feet two in heels but she carried herself proudly erect in the hope of looking taller than she actually was and who knew, maybe she might even add an inch or two to her height? The smart bronzy frock she wore was new and vastly becoming. She had dressed carefully, brushing her thick dark hair until it fell in heavy, shining waves to her shoulders. She wondered if Bart would like her frock and smiled again, then as quickly sobered.

"I hope I won't make an idiot of myself this afternoon," she said half aloud. "After all, we're not actually engaged—yet."

She wished things could have been definitely settled before he left. She knew her mother would approve. In fact, she had an idea she rather expected it. Her eyes grew dreamy as she recalled the night his parting kiss had been different. Or had she only imagined it? A little shiver shook her for a moment. It wasn't just a brotherly feeling he had for her—no—no—it couldn't be. It was certainly no sisterly affection she entertained for him. She had loved him all her life but not as she loved him now. He must love her—he must!

The doorbell rang and she ran into the hall to lean over the baluster. Sarah opened the door but it was Cousin Louise Sabin who entered. Darn her! Why did she have to come right now when Penny wanted Bart to herself? There was so little time! Before Sarah could close the door, Bart entered. He was

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wearing his uniform and Penny's breath caught in admiration as she gazed down at him. Then her hand went to her mouth to stifle a cry of horror, for Louise Sabin held out her hands to him and with a murmur of passionate surrender, melted into his arms. Even as the girl stared, too stunned to move or close her eyes, Bart's head bent and their lips met in a long, revealing kiss.

Hurt and bewildered, Penny fled to the attic to bury herself behind the old secretary—a hiding place dating from childhood. She couldn't face them. Bart must never know, nor Louise. Too stricken to weep she lay and shuddered in abject misery for what seemed hours. Dimly she heard them calling her. Heard Louise's lilting voice coming nearer—probably looking in her room and gradually receding; heard her laugh triumphantly, it seemed to the unhappy girl. Then Bart's insistent shout and at last silence. No doubt they had given up the search. After a time she heard the front door slam. Bart always slammed that front door. She crept to the front window to watch him leave the house for, perhaps, the last time. A sob caught in her throat as she saw Louise, both hands clasped about Bart's arm—saw their eyes cling as they walked slowly down the street. Penny gulped and then the tears came. She dashed them angrily away.

"I never want to see either of you again," she told their retreating backs. "How could you do this to

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me, Bart? I—I ——” She shook herself and brushed the hair from her eyes. As she crept down the attic stairs the faint tinkle of china and the soft murmur of voices reached her. Her mother was serving tea to callers and wouldn’t miss her just yet. Penny felt she simply couldn’t face anyone in her present mood. Back in her room she powdered her nose, caught up a coat and slipped down the back stairs and out along the walk beside the garage to the hedge through which she squeezed into a neighbor’s garden and so reached the next street.

Perhaps she would never see Bart again. Perhaps he would be killed or taken prisoner to be tortured and maimed and —— Oh, no! Please God, not that! Better that he die at once—cleanly—drowned or shot; but never taken prisoner. But he was already a prisoner—a prisoner to Louise Sabin. And now Penny felt she understood the secret antagonism that had for years existed between her and her lovely cousin.

“It was a premonition,” she told herself, moodily —“a presentiment that some day she would annex the man I love.” She gulped and blew her nose in an effort at self-control.

What a simpleton she had been! What an egotistical sap! Bart had always urged her to stay as she was, serene, restful and sweet. To remain untouched by this modern whirl. He adored her lack of ambition—the fact that she loved ease and being waited

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on and she, poor fool, had thought he meant it. But when it came to choosing a wife—oh, oh, how could she have been such an idiot? How could any man see her when Louise was around? Louise with her amazing beauty, her poise and her ability to do well anything she attempted. Then, too, Louise was a widow at twenty-six—two years younger than Bart, while she, Penny, was only just out of her teens. But just the same, she wasn't a child any longer. She was a woman with a woman's capacity for loving and suffering. What if her life had been sheltered by doting parents—protected from hardships and unpleasant experiences? It was simply because she had been a sickly child, and since the death of her father her mother had lavished all her love and devotion on her.

With the death of her father things were reversed. After that summer spent in Maine with her grandfather, Penny's health improved and it was her mother who was frail. Why, only last month, Doctor Warrick had pronounced her one hundred percent physically fit and her mother, too, was now practically well. She wished her father had lived. Somehow she couldn't talk to her mother about this hurt; but she could have confided in her father who had always understood. Tears flooded her eyes and she stumbled. This would never do—she had never been a cry-baby and didn't intend starting now.

She strode along the almost deserted street to the outskirts of town. Walking always soothed her

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although she did little of it these days. Her mother liked to have her with her almost constantly except when she was entertaining her closest friends—and Uncle Stephen Lowell. Penny knew he was in love with her mother and had become reconciled to the idea of her mother's re-marriage.

The early dark of the October day was settling over the city. Already street lights had come on and over on Prospect Hill across the valley in which Wellsport lay, Good Samaritan Hospital glowed like a beacon. Bart had intended coming back to Wellsport to practice—perhaps to work in the hospital. Not Harwood Memorial. He said he wanted to treat the poor, the outcast and derelict and that meant Good Samaritan. Penny stiffened. It would do no good to go on being sorry for herself. She still had her pride. No one suspected what a fool she was—unless Louise did. Even before her cousin had married Gordon Sabin she had teased Penny about her crush on Bart Ames, warning her of what a doctor's wife would have to endure. Louise vowed *she* would never marry a doctor and from among her many suitors had chosen Gordon Sabin of the Sabin Woods Products Company. Gordon was thought to be a wealthy man. Louise had a beautiful home and everything her heart desired. Gordon died three years later and Louise was left a widow at twenty-four with barely enough money to keep her in comfort—or so she said. Now there had been talk of another mar-

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riage for her. This time with Alan Lowell, the architect, Uncle Stephen's son. What had happened to that affair? Penny wondered. Could it possibly be Bart's uniform? She knew some girls went mad over uniforms.

For the first time Penny was glad Bart was going to war. She wouldn't have to watch them billing and cooing. Wouldn't have to attend their wedding—at least for the duration, and perhaps by the time the war was over and Bart came home she would be completely cured. Perhaps this ache in her heart would have disappeared. She hoped so—she devoutly prayed so although she hadn't much faith that it would. Why, Bart was a part of her life! Louise had so much. She could have any man she wanted. Why did she have to choose Bart? Over and over again she asked herself this question. Why? At last she honestly told herself that perhaps Louise was better suited to him than little Penny Stuart. Louise was not only beautiful but she was clever, too. She could do just about anything.

"And what can I do?" she asked herself bitterly. Bart had dubbed her "purely ornamental" when she had tried to do things for which she had neither the strength nor the aptitude.

"We have to have beauty, darling," he had consoled. "Just being your lovely self is accomplishment enough for one small girl."

But that was long ago. Suddenly she wondered why

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no one ever asked her to do things, except Louise who while exploiting her always made her feel incompetent—inferior. But other people. She was invited to bazaars, church and club affairs; but never to work. Just to be present. It was the same at home. She had never been allowed to so much as dust her own room or make her bed and shamefacedly she acknowledged that now she didn't even attempt to do anything.

"I'm a parasite!" she flayed herself. "Louise belongs to Red Cross, bosses the Canteen, is on the Harwood Hospital Board, the Neighborhood House and any number of other organizations. Besides that she's a huge social success. She works, or at least she gets things done. What ails me?"

For the first time in her life, Penny felt a surge of ambition, a longing to have a part in the rushing, busy life of the community. Yet what could she do? She wasn't trained for anything. She had spent her days and nights dreaming, luxuriating, merely being happy.

She quickened her steps. There was no danger of meeting either Bart or Louise in this part of town. No doubt they had gone to Louise's apartment and Louise would drive him to the station or the barracks or armory or wherever the contingent started from. A car passed, slowed and drew up at the curb. A young man in the uniform of a pilot got out and shouted enthusiastically:

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"Hi! Penny! Wait for me! Fire somewhere or what?"

The girl turned a startled face over her shoulder and retraced her steps, a pleased smile brightening her somber face. She shook hands with the tall young aviator and murmured accusingly:

"You, too?" as she eyed the uniform. Suddenly she was angry. "I'm sick of uniforms—I hate them, Nick Marshall!"

NICK MARSHALL STARED AT THE GIRL BEFORE HIM in wide-eyed astonishment at her sudden and vehement outburst. "Gosh, Penny!" he exclaimed. "What ails you? The gals all go nuts over our snappy outfits. What do you mean, you're sick of uniforms?"

"I am," Penny snapped. "And I hate this old war and ——"

"Who doesn't, darling?" Nick soothed. "But we can't let the enemy keep on twisting Uncle Sam's nose without retaliating, can we?"

"Oh, I know all that," the girl answered belligerently. "And I can still hate it all, can't I? I wish I could go some place where I'd never see a uniform or hear a thing about war ——"

"Poor baby!" the young man murmured, but there was no pity in his voice. "Won't you ever grow up, Pen? Do you expect to go through life—perhaps live to be seventy-five or eighty—and never see or hear, much less encounter, unpleasantness? Well, all I can say is—you won't."

"I—I don't expect to. I—I just don't —— I hate all this mess," Penny stammered, ashamed of her outburst. "Don't let's quarrel, Nick," she pleaded. "Tell me all the news. How is Nora—and Rusty? And what are you doing in Wellsport?"

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"Nora's fine as silk—busy as a basket of monkeys. She's up to her eyes in war work. Got her cap last week ——"

"Cap? What cap and why?" Penny interrupted.

"Nurse's Aide over at General Hospital. She gives four days a week to that and two evenings to Red Cross besides doing Canteen work and knitting. She says she feels she's helping Rusty who's overseas, you know. She won't let herself worry about him—but—poor kid, she hasn't heard a word in five weeks."

"That's what I mean," Penny cried stormily.

"I know," Nick said. "Come on, let me drive you home and we can talk."

She went docilely enough although her thoughts smoldered. Freddy Nettleton, "Rusty," and Nora were to have been married in the spring ——.

"How could Nora bear to let him go, Nick?" she asked as Nick tucked a rug about her knees. "Why didn't they get married before he left? Lots of people do ——"

"Oh, I guess Sis was willing all right; but Rusty said it wouldn't be fair to her—being on a destroyer and all he didn't know in what shape he would come back if at all. It was pretty tough on her but she took it like a soldier. She's really wonderful, Penny. Rusty's a swell guy ——" He caught her hand in his and tucked it beneath his arm, patting it before he released it. Penny didn't resist. Somehow she felt comforted. Nick had been sweet to her each summer

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she spent at her grandfather's. She told herself he was like a brother.

" You know, I came to Wellspорт to see you, Penelope Stuart, just in case you're interested," he explained as he set the car in motion. " I felt a strong urge to pick up where we left off last summer. You see, I'm expecting to shove off any day now and—well—will you write to me, Penny? Even though you hate uniforms, darling—I'm the same guy you swam and sailed and danced and had fun with, you know. How about it? "

" You're sweet, Nicky," Penny said softly and felt less forlorn. " Of course I'll write to you if you tell me where you are. Did you go to the house? "

" Sure, and your mother hadn't any idea where you were. She didn't know you had gone out. I've been scouring the city for you and it was just chance that led me to make a cross country detour through a side street. I've been watching a hatless girl in a gray fur coat hurrying along this street and somehow I felt it was you but wasn't quite sure because you're a long way from home, sweetheart, and the hour grows late."

" Late? " She looked at her watch and exclaimed in dismay. " I had no idea I had been out so long. Mother was serving tea to some of her friends and I didn't feel in the mood so I just deserted her. No doubt Mr. Lowell has dropped in by this time so she won't be lonely, but—oh, I'm sorry ——"

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Nick threw a glance at her and asked: "Don't you like this man—this Lowell? And just what is his status in your household, my child?"

"I have a hunch he's in love with Mother," Penny told him.

"O-oh! And you don't approve?"

"I don't mind. He's a good scout and if it will make Mother happy, who am I to object? After all, it's her life."

"You don't sound very enthusiastic about it, or is it something else that has thrown a shadow across your cloudless life, darling?"

"Don't be silly," the girl retorted. "I'm sick of being kept in cotton—protected from life. I want to get a job—a real job where I'll have to work," she went on impulsively and to her own very real amazement. "But not with soldiers or anything to do with the war. Just what must one do to become a Nurse's Aide, Nick?"

"Oh, you have to give certain hours each day to helping the nurses in the hospital—not doing actual nursing, you understand, just helping—making beds, waiting on patients, running errands, etc. Just making yourself generally useful as the name implies. Sis adores it; but I don't know about you, Penny. You've always had it pretty soft and easy, you know. Yes you have," as Penny shifted uncomfortably in her seat beside him. "Sis didn't like it at first, though. She had some fool notion one of the R.N.'s was

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imposing on her; but she took it in her stride—sort of holding to the feeling she was indirectly helping Rusty, you know, and now she loves it. She says if he doesn't come back she intends taking the nurses' training and devoting her life to good works. Of course she won't. Nora's too darned pretty and sweet—anyway, she looks cute in her uniform and now that she has her cap, too, feels as if at last she amounts to something."

"Nora always did amount to something," Penny told him, feeling very small and insignificant.

Only one car stood at the curb before the house when Nick drew up before it. She recognized it as belonging to Stephen Lowell. The callers must have been gone for hours and no doubt Maggie was fit to be tied.

"You're staying for dinner, Nick?" she asked as she got out of the car.

"Sorry, Pen. I've got a date for dinner but I'll be over later—eight or half past, if you are going to be in. Are you?"

Penny paused on the top step to look down at the tall, slender boy below her. His blue eyes were raised to hers and she thought in sudden amazement: "Why, Nick is handsome—and—he—he likes me. Maybe he even loves me a little." She held out her hand to him. Her eyes were warm and friendly, her smile gentle.

"Even if I had a date, Nick, I should break it.

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Oh, there are so many things we must talk over. I'll be waiting for you."

Nick released the hand he held and smiled up at her. Then saluting smartly, he turned back to his car just as Sarah opened the door. Penny waved and entered the house.

"Well, it's about time you decided to return to your home, Penny Stuart," Sarah reproached. "We didn't know you had gone out. You didn't say and —I—your mother ——"

"Oh, Sarah," the girl interrupted, "how silly! Surely I don't have to announce it to the whole world every time I go for a walk, do I? I'm sorry," she said quickly at Sarah's flush. "Hello, I'm back!" she called brightly, pausing at the drawing-room door. "Oh, hello, Uncle Stephen! I'll be down in a minute, Mother." She turned and ran up the stairs before her mother could voice any protest.

Sarah had already preceded her and was fussing about, freshening the fire in the grate, rearranging the toilet articles on the immaculate dressing table and surreptitiously eyeing her young mistress with something akin to consternation.

"Your mother worries easy, Miss Penny," Sarah, who had been Penny's nurse, explained after a minute in which Penny stared out the window into the bleak and shadowy garden. "Maybe you'd best lie down for a spell," she went on, sweeping a dinner dress from the chaise longue to a chair and fluffing up the

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already fluffy pillows. "I could bring you up a tray. You look sort of feverish to me." She touched the girl's glowing cheeks with loving fingers.

"Sarah Bates!" Penny exclaimed, jerking away. "I wish you would stop making an invalid of me. Lie down indeed! At this time of day? You make me sick. Pray why should it suddenly become necessary that I lie down?"

"Oh," the maid said unhappily, "I just thought—you been gone a long time—missed something—may-be it's just as well, at that."

Penny turned abruptly. "What did I miss? Nothing important, I imagine. Nothing very exciting ever happens in this house any more." She kept her eyes steadily on Sarah's perturbed face.

"Doctor Bart came to say good-bye—but likely he forgot to do it after what happened," Sarah explained morosely. "What he sees in that one—" she muttered. "He'll be good and sorry. All ain't gold that glitters and you mark my words —"

"Stop muttering in your beard, Sarah Bates," Penny said sharply. "And if you're trying to tell me that Bart and Cousin Louise are in love with each other—it's no news to me —"

Sarah Bates sat down suddenly in the nearest chair. "Then—then you knew it already? You seen it coming? You ain't a bit surprised? And here I been thinking—I mean, I been hoping—well, no matter. He's welcome to her —"

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"She's very beautiful, Sarah, don't forget that," Penny reminded her, "and she's got that certain something that will get her any man she wants. I'm wondering—what about Alan? Mother thought that would be a match, especially as Louise knows his father objects."

Sarah sniffed. Sarah had her own ideas and had been long enough in the Stuart household to feel quite free to express them. "It's the uniform that got her this time, Miss Penny," she stated positively, "and the poor fool man was just like putty in her hands. Love? Pooh! That ain't my idea of love, that ain't."

Penny giggled somewhat hysterically. She put her arm about the thin shoulders of the maid and inquired teasingly: "What do you know about love, my good woman? Just what is love, anyway?"

Sarah drew away and stiffened pugnaciously. "Well, it ain't what I saw this afternoon —"

"What you saw, Sarah? Shame on you for spying. Wasn't it like the movies, darling?"

Sarah walked toward the door. "I wasn't spying, Miss Penny," she said huffily. "The whole thing was so brazen it could have been done in the front yard for all she cared—the hussy! She just held out her two arms to him the minute he entered the front door and—well—what could he do? He went into 'em. The more fool he —" The door shut with grim finality as Sarah went out.

Penny gasped and shivered in sudden wretched-

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ness. But it was only for a moment. She smoothed back her hair and gave a hurried touch to lips, a bit of powder on nose and went downstairs to listen to what her mother and Uncle Stephen had to say.

"Your father loved Bart as a son, darling," her mother said when Penny made no comment at the piece of news her mother imparted. "It was undoubtedly due to his encouragement that Bart decided on becoming a surgeon. Mrs. Ames favored the law; but the boy had little liking for it. It was your father who discovered Bart's secret ambition and it was he who urged him to take a stand in the matter. Perhaps it was because Philip had been frustrated in his own desire for surgery that he was so eager to help Bart. The factory had taken him and it held him a prisoner until the day he died while still such a young man."

She sighed and touched her eyes with her handkerchief. Stephen Lowell made sympathetic sounds and reached over to pat her slender white hand.

"Do you remember how I wanted to be a nurse, Mother?" Penny asked to ease the tension. "Daddy thought I might, at that." She smiled ruefully. "I guess I'm just about the most useless girl in existence."

"Nonsense," her mother rebuked. "You're sweet, and helpful to me, my darling. How could I have borne your father's loss and this persistent weakness of my own if I hadn't had you to lean on ——"

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"I'm afraid I'm a pretty frail reed," Penny murmured.

"Well, you're pretty, anyway," Stephen Lowell said gallantly, "and I agree with your mother. You are a charming and dutiful daughter —"

"But Mother doesn't need me now—she's practically well, and I'm going to do something —"

"Of course," her mother soothed somewhat startled at her placid child's sudden display of energy. "Louise will be glad to have your help at the Canteen—and with planning parties for the boys at Fort Charles. You must get some new frocks, darling. Tomorrow we'll drive over to Felicia's and see what she has for you. It might be fun, you know. I see now that I have been selfish in keeping you tied to my apron strings so long. We might even plan a party here for you or better still, a dinner and dance at the Club. What do you think of the idea, Penny?"

"Splendid!" Mr. Lowell exclaimed enthusiastically. Penny wondered why he should be so happy about it and examined him closely.

"No you don't, Mother," Penny said after a minute. "I don't mean that sort of activity. I mean I'm going in for real work—not knitting or dancing with soldiers. I'm going to take a course in first aid."

"You couldn't stand it," her mother shuddered.

"Why not?" the girl demanded. "There's nothing wrong with me except perhaps too much coddling. Listen, darling. I'm going to do something. I'll call

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one of the hospitals and find out what I must do to become a Nurse's Aide or a ward nurse or a scrub nurse or what have you. I think I shall like hospital work. Daddy encouraged me when I wanted to study nursing. Remember?"

"Yes," her mother reminded her. "You were ten and we were afraid we were going to lose you. I think your father would have encouraged you in anything just so you would go on living." She turned her pensive smile on Stephen Lowell. "Isn't it a miracle the way she has improved, Stephen? This is one time when coddling and extreme care proved beneficial. In a more rigorous environment our Penny would have faded away. Penny, dear, don't take on more than you can quite comfortably handle. Why not try being one of Louise's aides? She will see you don't overdo ——"

Penny laughed derisively. "Indeed I'll not be one of Louise's aides, Mother. I'm going to enlist as a Nurse's Aide for the duration—maybe I'll even enter training to become a real nurse—after the war is over. Nora Marshall joined as soon as Rusty left. Nick told me all about it. She has her cap now and gives five hours four days each week to it. I think it's grand, Mother, and I'm going to see about joining up at once."

Penny felt she would always remember that day in October as the turning point in her life. One thing she was sure of—it was the most tragic.

JUST BEFORE NICK MARSHALL WENT OVERSEAS HE wrote Penny a long letter of farewell in which he bared his heart. He adored her and wanted her to think of him as a man who loved her with all his heart. He wanted her letters and her prayers. He was enthusiastic over his chance to get into actual combat and hoped to give a good account of himself. He urged her to keep on with her hospital work and if the war wasn't over within a year or two, to take the training and become a nurse.

"You'll make a swell nurse, Penny," he wrote. "There's something so sane and healthy about you—something so fresh and wholesome. You haven't been spoiled by glamour or tarnished by night-life. After we have cleaned up this mess and the world gets on an even keel once more, you will find you have taken more out of your war work—for in spite of your determination to have nothing to do with it, you are, you know—than you have put into it. Then you will be a woman, my darling, and a finer one, too."

Penny thought of this as she climbed the broad, shallow steps of the huge sprawling building that was Good Samaritan Hospital. For the first time since she had known Nick Marshall she thought of him as a man. Always he had seemed just a boy—one whom

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she could rely upon to give her a good time. Suddenly she saw him as a man doing a man's work and it sobered her. In her mind's eye she saw him soaring above the clouds, clear-eyed, brave-hearted, and a little prayer welled up inside her: "May his strength be as the strength of ten, dear Lord," she breathed. "Keep him ever within the hollow of Thy hand."

She entered the quiet lobby and registered for work.

Mrs. Blodgett at the desk smiled.

"You're to go to Women's Surgical again, Stuart," she told her. "It seems McClusky's on duty alone with two aides to help her. Ah, but they're green girls, my dear," she went on as Penny looked surprised. "I imagine you're to take on the aides, if you know what I mean."

Penny nodded and went along the corridor to the elevator. Two nurses stepped in after her and Penny smiled in answer to their greeting.

"Well, how does our glamour gal like her job?" dark-haired Hilda Moore asked, nudging the other nurse who winced and drew back. "I bet it's some different from golf and tennis or teas and dances."

Penny ignored the jibe and answered evenly: "Of course."

"Who's the boy friend, Stuart?" Moore went on, her tone bitter. "He must rate plenty high with you to warrant all this devotion to duty, or don't you think of it as a duty—a privilege, perhaps? Finding

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out how the other half lives and comports itself during illness."

The elevator came to a stop and Penny stepped out, her head high and her gray eyes cold with scorn. Moore had been antagonistic from the first and Penny was glad when she heard she had gone on private duty. This was the first time she had come in contact with her in weeks.

Martha Hamilton fell into step beside her as she hurried along to the ward. "I hope you won't mind Moore's tongue, Stuart," the nurse apologized, as Penny seemed unaware of her presence. "We all suffer from it. You see, her fiancé married another girl. He's a doctor and happens to be stationed in Australia. He married a nurse over there—one from this very hospital, too. It hit her hard and she has completely soured on life. The thing is, he wanted her to enlist, but she wouldn't. Not that they were likely to be sent over in the same unit—it doesn't happen that way—often. Anyway, she felt at the time that people were losing their heads over this war and refused to get excited about it. I'm telling you this so you won't take any of her jibes too much to heart. She's been badly hurt and so wants to hurt others. Understand?"

Penny nodded and bit her lip. "I'm sorry," she said quietly. "Thank you for telling me. I didn't suppose nurses ever wanted to hurt."

"Oh, we're human," the other answered. "And

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Moore's a fine nurse. She doesn't show that side to her patients."

"I should hope not," Penny said.

She went on around the corner to Women's Surgical and muttered to herself:

"Moore isn't the only one in the world to have her heart smashed to bits. But I certainly don't intend to let my disappointment embitter me—spoil my life. Not if I can help it."

Her chin lifted and a determined glint sparkled in her gray eyes.

Ruth McClusky was bending over a bed at the far end of the ward. A white-faced aide was holding the emesis basin with weak, uncertain fingers and biting her lips while a tall girl stood looking on, tears running down her thin cheeks. Penny walked over to say quietly:

"Need any help, Nurse?"

McClusky smiled and the strained look left her face. "Run into the service room, Worden, and bathe your face," she told the tall aide. "It really doesn't hurt Mrs. Morrison too much. And you know it has to be done. A little closer, Franklin—steady. For heaven's sake!" as basin and girl slumped to the floor beside the narrow bed. Penny deftly took over. The girl on the floor sat up abruptly.

"I'm terribly sorry, Nurse," she whimpered. "I—I feel sort of s-sick."

"Get yourself a drink of water," Penny advised

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her crisply. " You will soon get used to this sort of thing. We all go through it, you know."

Betty Franklin left hastily and Penny and the nurse grinned at each other and even Mrs. Morrison, who was enduring a painful nasal irrigation, managed a smile.

" Of course I would draw the least adaptable—I always do. That's what comes of being a good example, Stuart," McClusky complained philosophically. " Let it be a lesson to you. But why send me two at once? One would have been plenty. I don't know how they happened to let me have you even for brief moments, Stuart. Now once more, my dear," she said to the patient. " I'm sorry, but you know we have to do it."

The dark eyes of the slender woman on the bed closed and opened understandingly and the work went on with no more trouble. Penny bathed the damp face of the patient and smoothed the rumpled counterpane.

" I'll clean up here and—oh, my dear, I'll have to change your bed again. I didn't know there was anything in that basin when Franklin dropped it."

Ruth McClusky was already changing the dressing on a nearly healed incision in the next bed and Penny hurried to the service room for cleaning equipment. The two new aides were comparing notes.

" Listen, Stuart," the tall Joyce Worden said, no longer weeping. " I didn't know we were expected

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to do nothing but the dirty work—things like emptying —”

“ Of course you knew. Just what did you imagine a Nurse's Aide was supposed to do, then? ” Penny demanded, filling a basin with water, adding disinfectant and as she turned to leave the room she added grimly: “ You certainly received instructions as to your duties—we all did. Why did you decide to continue the work if you were going to turn squeamish? You're the very first girls I've come across in the more than five months I've been here who have balked at handling an emesis basin. No one enjoys it exactly, but it has to be done and I never heard of it killing anyone. After all we are here to help the nurses—not hinder them. I'll get fresh bed linen and then you come along and watch me mop up and change Mrs. Morrison's bed. It's easy for me now and you'll soon learn. Don't be goofs, girls. You'll live to laugh at this, you know. Come on. Pull yourselves together and work.”

They followed her and Penny grinned to herself as she heard Betty whisper:

“ It's worth it just to see Penny Stuart get her hands dirty—imagine! Penny Stuart! ”

But they followed her about and were soon helping. When the supervisor appeared they were all busy at various tasks and she beamed on them impartially. As she left the ward she murmured to McClusky:

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"It's time you had a few raw recruits up here. We can use these girls in other places."

"Help!" cried Ruth, holding her head. "Spare me, Miss Donaldson. Let me keep Stuart another week. She compensates for all the agony I have gone through trying to do the work of four nurses. She's worth a dozen students and is as good as some nurses. Too bad she isn't trained—we could use a few girls like her; but then, I suppose, Uncle Sam would snap her up."

"I don't know, McClusky," Miss Donaldson replied dubiously. "You know Pediatrics is terribly short-handed. Hart goes next week and Barney thinks she'll follow the week after. I don't know what we're going to do. Of course the new class of students will be of use almost immediately; but it isn't as large as we had hoped it would be. The aides are a godsend. I wish we had twice as many."

Ruth McClusky's tired eyes followed her. "We're too far from the battle front," she said to herself. "Girls don't get a thrill out of nursing civilians like they would if the patients were soldiers. They don't realize that by releasing a trained nurse for duty abroad they are actually giving help to some injured fighter—maybe their own husband, brother or sweetheart. Oh, they've been told all that—have no doubt read it in newspapers and magazines, but it hasn't hit them where they live. This job doesn't seem romantic or spectacular enough for most girls. I wonder how

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it happened Stuart became an aide. That girl's a wonder and they called her 'useless.' Bosh! She could give her pals in Junior League aces and spades when it comes to real, honest-to-gosh work. I'm all for you, Penny Stuart! We'd like a few more 'useless' gals of the same ilk."

And Penny went about her business quite unaware of the accolade bestowed upon her.

Once again Betty Franklin pulled a boner. This time when she gave a patient a lighted cigarette. She should have known better. She had been told that it was against rules in the wards where smoke was offensive to some of the patients, and when the nurse in charge rebuked her for it she was almost impudent—then sullen. Penny tried to smooth things over and was promptly squelched for her pains and subsided, busying herself at the farther end of the ward.

"I don't like that white-livered girl," muttered young Mrs. Walters from the semi-privacy of the alcove. "Don't let her come near me. She gives me the heebie-jeebies. Who does she think she is? Garbo? I'll have none of her."

"Oh, come now, Mrs. Walters," Penny soothed. "She's new. After all, you know, she's donating her services and ——"

"Well, let her donate them somewhere else. I can dispense with them."

"She will be somewhere else soon," Penny assured

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her. "We all will be. They don't leave us in one place very long. We go where the need is greatest."

The girl on the bed gazed curiously at the busy aide. "Why did you decide to take up this work, Miss Stuart?" she asked at last. "I know who you are, of course. Everyone in this town does, and I've been wondering. You haven't any brothers in this war. I know you are an only child."

Penny marveled that people seemed to know so much about her and found the knowledge interesting. Now she smiled at the inquisitive face on the pillow and said simply:

"I guess I just wanted to be useful, Mrs. Walters, and this seemed to be the answer."

"But you have the reputation—I mean, it's so hard and often unpleasant and you don't have to do it. There are so many other and more attractive ways of helping—"

"Not to me," Penny replied. "You see, I always wanted to be a nurse and maybe I shall—after the war."

"But does your mother approve?" persisted the girl.

Penny nodded. She wished people would let her alone and not try to pry into the whys and wherefores of her decision to become an aide. It annoyed her. She considered it none of their business, and yet, as in this instance, she felt there was nothing malicious or mean about this girl's curiosity. After all,

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she was laid up here with nothing to do but amuse herself trying to learn everything interesting there might be about the girls who catered to her wants.

"Do you know the Dean girl?" Mrs. Walters asked after a moment.

"Louella Dean? Oh yes. Isn't she a wonder? She looks quite frail and yet she works long hours every day. When was she in this ward? I ran into her the other afternoon."

"Last week. I like that girl. She's got good stuff in her. When I get out of here I'm going to do something for her. Take her into my apartment, if she'll let me, and see that she has proper food and rest. That will be my contribution to the war effort. The only thing is she's a proud, independent little thing. But I'm afraid she'll wear herself out trying to carry this whole horrible mess on her own slender shoulders. Has she told you about her husband—Mac? I hope the fellow appreciates her, but it isn't in the cards that he does." She spoke bitterly. Penny smiled.

"Don't tell me you're a cynic, Mrs. Walters," she chided. "I have seen your husband and he appears quite devoted to you."

The girl's lip curled. "The man you saw here yesterday wasn't my husband, my dear," she said baldly. "He's the other man—the other leg of the triangle. You've heard of matrimonial triangles, I suppose, or don't they call them that in your par-

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ticular class? You see, Miss Stuart, my dear husband is, or was, in California with his mother."

"Oh!" Penny said, surprised and a little dismayed. She hated scandal and Mrs. Walters had seemed such a pleasant girl. Pretty, too, in a somewhat pronounced way. "I'm sorry. I didn't know," she went on and prepared to leave.

"Please don't go. You haven't finished me yet," the patient reminded her. "I want one of my own gowns for visiting hours this afternoon. And if you stick around you may catch a glimpse of my precious mother-in-law and of my husband. I assure you it will be well worth your trouble. Anyway, I should enjoy letting you see something of what I have had to endure from that woman for a whole year."

"Oh, but Mrs. Walters —" Penny demurred.

"Be a sport, Miss Stuart. Toby's mother has the cracked idea that the clay that went into the fashioning of a Walters is just a shade finer than that used for anyone else in this rotten world. I should like your honest opinion of her and of my husband, too. Not that it will make any difference to me, you understand. I'm all washed up with them. The other man, Joel Rankin, is worth a dozen of them even if he was brought up in an orphanage. Not the same one that raised me—oh, didn't you know I was a foundling? I was and I'm not a bit ashamed of it—only—well, it makes me see red when people like Mother Walters high-hat me. I'm as good or better

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than she ever was even if I don't know who my parents were. What if they lived and loved without benefit of clergy? The possibility of that being true doesn't hurt me. I know what I am and I'm not ashamed of the me that is I." She giggled then gasped and caught at her side. Penny laid a restraining hand on her forehead.

"I don't think you should excite yourself, Mrs. Walters," she warned. "And I think you are quite right. It's what we, ourselves, think of us that counts, not anything other people might think or say."

"I became rather involved," the patient said, grinning in amusement at her last statement. "But you get the general idea, I'm sure. You're a smart girl, Miss Stuart, and a mighty sweet one. I like to have you take care of me—it sort of smooths me the right way, if you know what I mean."

Penny laughed. "I think you're something of a fake, Mrs. Walters," she said, laying out two of the girl's nightgowns for her decision. "You want people to think you're hard-boiled when you're not at all. You've been hurt and refuse to show it."

"Will you stick around this afternoon? Can you?" Her tone was almost pleading and Penny got the impression the girl was afraid, whether of her mother-in-law or her husband she couldn't decide.

"I really don't know. Perhaps. I think I'm a little curious myself. Anyway, I'm bringing up your two-o'clock tray in just a few minutes and then we'll get

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you ready for callers. How do you know your mother-in-law is coming this afternoon—and your husband, of course? ”

“ Joel told me. He’s a prince, Miss Stuart. So kind and so understanding. Mother Walters hates him and has poisoned Toby’s mind. It is she who has made him jealous. Toby never would have thought of it himself. Oh, well—what is to be, will be.”

“ Nonsense,” Penny returned sturdily. “ You love your husband, don’t you? At least you married him and not very long ago. Then why let a misunderstanding smash things for you? Don’t be foolish. Now I must get your tray. Be good while I’m gone and don’t think of any more ways you can punish your husband or your mother-in-law. It won’t get you anything except misery.”

Penny was surprised that she should feel the least interest in Mrs. Walters’ marital troubles. She always listened to the patients’ stories, intimate though most of them were, with a detached mind. But there was something almost tragic about Ann Walters. Penny felt sure she was passionately devoted to her husband (whom Penny privately thought of as a weak sister) and was suffering because of this misunderstanding. She wondered if there was anything she could do to help and firmly declared to herself there wasn’t. She was determined never to get mixed up in the affairs of anyone here in the hospital although she was sorely tempted to do something to help little Louella Dean.

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After the meager contents of the tray had been disposed of, Penny combed Mrs. Walters' lovely red hair and tied a pale green satin ribbon about it, fixing a perky bow at one side. The gown the patient chose to wear was also pale green and the fluffy white bed-jacket about her shoulders gave her the appearance of an especially fascinating angel.

"A touch of rouge and some of that nice expensive powder, please," she begged when Penny held the mirror for her. "I'm glad I managed to get this alcove. It's almost private and there's no one very near. I don't think I could have stood having anyone close to me just now. Hurry with the rouge —"

"I wouldn't," Penny advised. "You look sweet and so—well—so appealing—young and vulnerable —"

Ann Walters grinned. "I bet you're actually enjoying yourself, Penelope Stuart. It's like a play, isn't it? All right. Ring up the curtain for Act I. Enter estranged husband and the villain-ess!"

THE WORDS HAD SCARCELY LEFT ANN WALTERS' lips when a tall militant appearing woman paused at the entrance of the long ward, blocking the passage. She surveyed the occupants of the room with an arrogant stare. A slim, anxious-looking young man was just behind and made as if to push past but the imperious female remained stationary for another moment.

"Here they come," whispered Ann from the bed and closed her eyes as if unable to bear the sight.

Penny placed a chair not too close to the bed and smiled pleasantly. On the woman came like an army with banners. The young man followed. Ann caught Penny's hand in hers. She was trembling.

"Hello, Mother Walters," she said trying to make her voice casual. "And Toby! This is an unexpected pleasure." Toby bent to kiss her and the girl's eyes flooded with childish tears which she blinked angrily away. "This is one of the famous Nurse's Aides, Mother Walters," she explained rather faintly. Then her voice steadied and took on volume. "And this is my husband, Miss Stuart. Find a chair, Toby. Don't bother, Miss Stuart," as Penny turned to bring another chair. "Let him get it. He's a big, strong man and should learn to wait upon himself. Did you have fun on your trip?" she asked her mother-in-law.

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"It wasn't a pleasure trip," the older woman reminded her. "You know it was for business, pure and simple. We made an excellent deal and I am well satisfied." She was eyeing Penny with growing interest. With a sudden start she thawed visibly and the patient winked at the other girl. Penny braced herself for a flood of questions and then decided to withdraw. But she reckoned without the old lady.

"What Stuart?" she demanded.

"Penelope Stuart—over on Chestnut Place," explained her daughter-in-law with gusto.

"O-oh! I'm happy to meet you, my dear," the woman said, nodding in approval. Her entire demeanor changed. Suddenly she was merely a rather large handsome woman, anxious for the welfare of a beloved daughter and eager to atone for any seeming negligence. Penny found it most amusing if a little bewildering. "And how is our dear child progressing? She's a headstrong, naughty girl, but nonetheless very precious, Miss Stuart. We couldn't come before because—well, you know how business deals are, I'm sure. We were in the midst of a crisis and simply had to stay on. And, of course, our thoughtless Ann here must choose that particular time to become ill. We left as soon as we could and arrived home only this morning."

She turned to Ann who was purposely refusing to look at her husband. "Dear Toby was all for flying back more than a week ago—in fact as soon as we

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received Mr. Rankin's wire; but I assured him you were having the very best of care—one senses such things, you know—and after all, it was just a simple appendectomy—well over when the wire reached us. Nothing was to be gained by rushing back here and I persuaded him to wait until our business was completed. It wouldn't have been wise to leave then when we were so nearly through. You understand, my dear?"

"Yes," the girl in the bed muttered with burning eyes. "Yes, I quite understand—only too well—everything." Her glance swept her husband with withering scorn and the young man buried his head in his hands. It was at that moment Penny got a brilliant idea. She turned to the older woman and said sweetly:

"Wouldn't you like to see the new solarium, Mrs. Walters? It is nearly completed and will mean so much to the patients here. Come along and I'll be glad to show you the way."

Mrs. Walters hesitated for the fraction of a moment while Ann looked frightened. With an encouraging wave of the hand to the estranged pair and a small smile of mischief Penny led the way from the alcove and down the long ward, just now somewhat crowded with visitors, to the corridor leading to the new solarium on the roof. If she dropped a word now and then of the sweetness and courage of the young wife back there in the semi-privacy of

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Women's Surgical, she did it without encouragement. Mrs. Walters wanted to talk about the Stuarts and their affairs. Suddenly Penny felt in duty bound to straighten out the mess this woman had managed to create. How, she didn't know; but she intended doing something.

She left Mrs. Walters to inspect the addition to the hospital and went back to the ward where she did a dozen jobs, swiftly and efficiently. It was some time before she again returned to see the result of her stratagem. Mrs. Walters the elder was not in sight. Toby was on his knees beside his wife's bed, his head buried in her shoulder. The girl raised wet eyes to Penny. Her smile was a rainbow, promising a happy future for them both. Penny slipped away and went in search of Mrs. Walters. She found her instructing one of the decorators the proper way—her way—to place the potted yews. The man was scratching his head after pulling and hauling the huge tubs about and was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind. Penny took pity on him and carried the woman off with the excuse that visiting hours were about over.

"This wretched hospital!" she scolded as she followed Penny with evident reluctance. "I don't understand Ann's coming here in the first place. And why didn't she take a private room instead of going into a ward? What must you think of us, my dear?"

"Why nothing, Mrs. Walters. I doubt if your

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daughter-in-law could get a room. We're full here at Good Samaritan. She is having the best of care and I'm sure she has been very comfortable. This is a splendid hospital and in spite of the free wards and the scores of city patients we have, there are any number of cultured people who come here in preference—probably because of the staff which is the finest in the world—we think."

"But no special nurse!" Mrs. Walters bleated.

"Nurses are scarce and I think, perhaps, your son's wife felt it wasn't necessary and wished to save expense where she could ——"

"But why? I'm sure Toby has never denied Ann anything since they were married. He is not rich, but quite able to provide his wife with a private room and trained nurses when necessary. Not that I am criticizing you, my dear, you understand. I'm sure it has been wonderful for Ann that you could be with her." Penny cringed—mentally.

"Do you live with them—your son and his wife, I mean?" Penny asked bluntly.

"No-o—not live with them exactly. I have been paying them a visit. I live in another part of the state ——"

"That's splendid, Mrs. Walters. I agree with you that young people should live by themselves—away from their families. Especially for the first few years. You are very wise, Mrs. Walters."

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"You sound like a middle-aged woman," the other laughed.

"Do I? Well, perhaps it's because I have heard of so many cases where there have been misunderstandings and even tragedy caused, often quite unintentionally, by in-laws giving advice or suggestions that were neither desired nor appreciated. Don't you believe it to be true, Mrs. Walters, that no house is big enough for two families? I'm sure you do, and you show your good sense in having your own home. After all, you are still a young woman ——"

Mrs. Walters laughed again and patted the girl's arm. "Well," she said and she sounded pleased, "I'm old enough to appreciate a spontaneous compliment, my dear."

Ruth McClusky smiled at Penny as the girl prepared to leave for the day. "Been doing a little Scout work, I see," she said. "Well, we get a chance to do a lot of that sort of thing here. There's something about a hospital that sort of mellows people—washes away sham and hypocrisy and makes them want to be decent. I doubt if even you could have accomplished much with old lady Walters—'The Major-domo,' Joel Rankin calls her—if you had tackled her any place beside here in Good Samaritan."

"Joel Rankin," repeated Penny. "He's the other leg of the triangle. Do you know him?"

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"Know him? Sure I know him. I've got a heavy date with him tonight if I can keep my eyes open long enough to change out of uniform. He's a prince, Stuart," McClusky said warmly.

"So-o! And Ann Walters was pulling my leg. Wait until I see that young lady tomorrow. I'll get even with her."

"Why? What did she tell you about him? That mother-in-law of hers tried to make something of his friendship with Ann. Was that it? Stuff and nonsense! Toby Walters is a lamb but suffers from a mother complex. That one would have objected if her precious son had married an angel—she might not have objected if he had married you, my dear. You see, you're Penelope Stuart and Ma Walters is nuts over social position. Well, poor Ann and poor Joel are both orphans—brought up in Children's Homes—not the same one. How they got together is like one of the stories Joel writes and is most unusual. But they did get together and they did click and that's that. They have been friends for years and probably always will be in spite of 'The Major-domo' and her nasty mind. Well, darling, see you tomorrow, God willing, and in the meantime, say a prayer for me that I won't fall asleep and disgrace my escort at the dinner dance tonight. It's one of those patriotic affairs where we all spend the money we've been saving for spring clothes on war bonds, and then try to feel well dressed, even stylish, in last year's down-

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at-heel duds. Oh, Patriotism, what sacrifices are suffered in thy name!"

"Oh, you!" Penny laughed affectionately. "You know you love it all—doing things for people—spending yourself to the last ounce of strength for the benefit of your patients—and so for your country." She was surprised at the wave of feeling that swept over her as she spoke. Why, it was all grand, this spending spree—this pouring out enthusiasm and strength as well as dollars. She had been missing a lot in not sensing it. She was helping. Penny Stuart was helping in the war effort. Helping Bart and Nick and all the other boys at the front. Indirectly, of course, and yet not so indirectly at that. Why, it might quite conceivably be that Bart or Nick would die if the nurse whose place she was trying to fill hadn't gone.

She left the hospital feeling happier than she had in months. Life was worth while. She was doing her part in helping free the world from the evils that had brought on this war.

At a small round table in the rear of Foster's Drug Store just a short block from the hospital, two girls sat sipping hot chocolate. Their coats were thrown back revealing the blue and white uniforms of Nurse's Aides. Once in a while a faint ripple of laughter came from one or the other but for the most part their manner and conversation seemed serious. The place

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was practically deserted and both girls turned toward the door as it suddenly opened, letting in a blast of blustery March wind.

"Hi, Penny! Penny Stuart!" hissed Helen Reed, the taller of the girls.

At the prescription counter, the newcomer swung about, then lifted her hand in greeting. The clerk handed her a small package and she paused to replace her change purse in her smart suede bag before joining the girls at the table.

"Sit down, Stuart. Finished for the day?" Helen Reed asked motioning to the seat opposite. "We're due back in half an hour. Have a drink—Dutch."

Beulah Hudson, little and blond, giggled. "We always go Dutch," she explained.

"Of course," Penny murmured. "But not chocolate. I'll have a cup of tea," she told the waitress. "And a slice of lemon, please. Nothing else."

"How can you drink that stuff?" Helen finished her chocolate, spooning the last drop, and sat back to wait.

"Tea?" Penny asked. "Don't you like tea?"

"Sure; but not laced with lemon juice," the other grimaced. "By the way, how are you getting on with old lady Marsh, Stuart? I had a dose of her last week when I was in Surgical, and was she a trial! I wonder how long they will keep her there. Seems to me she could be shoved into the general ward any time now."

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"Mrs. Marsh?" Penny murmured, sipping her tea. "Do you know I think the poor soul is lonely. She wants someone to make a fuss over her. She's very old and as far as I can find out is all alone in the world."

"Oh, no," Helen objected. "She has a grand-nephew somewhere overseas—Africa or Egypt or some place. At least that's what she told me."

"That's strange," Penny mused. "She told me she had no one—not a relative in the world who cared if she lived or died. It's lucky she has money enough to take care of her—an annuity, I believe. I doubt if she ever leaves the hospital."

"Well, in her case, it's as good a place as any," Beulah said philosophically. "Personally, I think the dame romances—lives in a book. But it makes interesting telling I suppose and if it gives her pleasure, who are we to object?"

The tall girl rose to her feet, gathering up gloves and bag as she prepared to depart. "I heard Donaldson tell McClusky they were going to send you up to Pediatrics for a while, Stuart. Kids, kids, kids—dozens of them and more arriving hourly—almost," she qualified. Her voice took on the deep, throaty tones of the supervisor: "Stuart has a way with children—really remarkable." She grinned at Penny. "So-o, you seem to have acquired a reputation, my gal. Know it?"

Penny shook her head. Her face was serious as she

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set down the empty cup and pulled on her heavy gloves. "I don't know about that, girls," she said slowly. "I only know I want to be of use wherever I can. It's the least I can do ——"

"And the torch? Who's the boy friend, Stuart?" came almost in unison.

Penny flushed and shook her head again. "No one—special," she said quietly and knew a guilty twinge as Nick's face passed before her mind's eye. "There are a number of men in the service I consider my friends but—no ——" She left it there and started for the door. The others exchanged glances and followed. On the street they separated, Penny walking briskly, the March wind whipping her dark hair about her face and icy particles of snow stinging her eyes. She hurried along the snowy street until she neared her own neighborhood, then slackened her pace. There was something she must remember to do. Call up Potter the florist and have a dozen red roses sent to Mrs. Marsh first thing in the morning. No card or perhaps a card with "From a friend" on it. She would be pleased and excited for days.

As she walked the last block, Penny wondered if there would be a letter for her on the table in the hall. She hadn't heard from Bart in several weeks now. She knew she shouldn't care, but she did. Nick Marshall wrote often. Sometimes she would receive three or four letters in the same mail. So, life being what it was, there would no doubt be a letter or let-

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ters from Nick. A sudden pain twisted her heart and she bit her lips to steady their trembling. How long was this going to last—this terrible bleakness—this end-of-the-world feeling? There were times when she felt sure she was completely cured—when she could even think of Bart and Louise quite calmly and without bitterness. Those were the times that Nick seemed very close to her and her heart swelled with something very like love for him; but somehow it didn't last.

She reached the corner upon which the Stuart house stood in its spacious grounds. A wrought iron fence set in bricks enclosed the entire property and since the salvage campaign there had been much discussion regarding replacing it with a fence of some other material. Mrs. Stuart favored white pickets while Penny wanted a low privet. It looked now as if Penny was to win her point because Uncle Stephen agreed with her and Mrs. Stuart, as always, placed entire confidence in Stephen Lowell's decisions. Groups of people, mostly women with a bare sprinkling of men, were leaving the house. A car or two stood at the curb and Penny loitered, hoping to be unobserved. But it was not to be and she was soon the center of an exclaiming, interested crowd. How did she like hospital work? Wasn't it frightfully hard? How had her mother ever allowed it? Didn't the nurses impose on the aides? Penny informed them she loved the work. It wasn't too hard—no harder

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than trying to amuse homesick boys at the Canteen, and the nurses were wonderful and appreciated every bit of help the aides were able to give them. She got away at last and mounted the wide stone steps of the rather imposing entrance of the old brick house.

Voces reached her from the drawing-room—the low laugh that was her mother's and the deep attractive drawl belonging to Stephen Lowell. Uncle Stephen always managed to outstay every other caller. Penny paused in the doorway to greet her mother and the sole remaining guest.

"Come in, darling," Mrs. Stuart called, holding out a slender hand in welcome. "And how did everything go today? Tired?"

"Not too tired," the girl replied, stooping to kiss her mother's cheek. "Hello, Uncle Stephen! Everything went about as usual. There was nothing very exciting today—just routine. Miss me?"

"Of course I did. I always miss you; but I know I must not be selfish when there is such dire need—everywhere"

"Doctor Hammond tells me you are in great demand, Penny," Uncle Stephen smiled. "He says it's a great pity you aren't studying to become a nurse. You seem to have the flair required —"

"Don't put ideas into the child's head, Stephen," interrupted Penny's mother worriedly.

"Doctor Hammond?" questioned Penny, ignoring the rest of the sentence. "The doctors don't

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know we aides exist. I think you're making that up, Uncle Stephen. But I think perhaps I shall take up nursing seriously—after the war," she went on slowly. "Good Samaritan is terribly short of nurses and even with the extra class of students, there is so much to do —"

"But after the war is over there will be plenty of nurses, Penny," her mother reminded her. "Why, it was just a little while ago the profession was overcrowded."

Mr. Lowell nodded understandingly. "Granted," he agreed. "But that was true of all the professions. The war has made many changes, remember, Adelaide. I doubt if there will ever again be too many nurses. It's a fine profession—a noble calling."

"But in Penny's case it isn't necessary, Stephen," Mrs. Stuart reminded him. "Then, too, she will marry and —"

"And be a better wife and mother for the training, my dear," the man said quickly. "No, Adelaide, I must disagree with you in objecting to Penny's becoming a nurse if she feels the urge. My advice is to let her—she will make an excellent one, I'm sure."

Penny smiled her thanks and patted her mother's hand. "Don't worry about me, darling," she said softly. "I have my hands full with just being an aide right now. That seems to be my job at present. We'll let the future take care of itself, shall we?"

"I need you at home, Penny," her mother said

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plaintively. "I couldn't bear to have you living over there on the hill—of seeing you scarcely at all ——" "

"If she married ——" Mr. Lowell reminded.

"That would be different. I should know she was safe and happy. It's the normal life for a girl and I should be satisfied to have it so; but the other—no—no, I couldn't bear it."

"Don't let us talk about it any more, Mother," Penny soothed. "I must run up and change. Any letters for me?"

"I think so. Sarah took charge of the mail before the guests arrived. She's so funny that way." Mrs. Stuart laughed indulgently. "I don't know whether she thinks my friends will confiscate our letters or if, perhaps, there might be a betraying envelope outsiders should be kept in the dark about although what it could possibly be I'm sure I wouldn't know. Run along and ask Sarah, darling, and if there happens to be anything for me, tell her to put it in my room. Stephen, you're staying for dinner?"

Penny went out. She climbed the long, winding stairs slowly. She hadn't realized she was tired. Sarah was in her room busy laying out the dress her young mistress was to wear at dinner and humming to herself as she smoothed the straight skirt of the plain white frock. A bright fire burned in the grate and the room was warm and attractive. Penny stretched full length on the chaise longue and sighed contentedly. It would be heavenly to lie here for the rest

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of the evening. Sarah came to hover over her, a tentative hand on the girl's cheek.

" You're all in, ain't you, Miss Penny," the maid complained. " I wish you'd quit that hospital and live the way you ought to. You ain't as strong as you think you are and why you had to get into it in the first place beats me. You lie right there and I'll bring you up a tray. By right, you ought to go straight to bed, that's what. I don't hold with this nonsense anyway and never did ——"

Penny seemed not to have heard. She had caught sight of two envelopes on her dressing table and sat up abruptly, her gray eyes enormous. Sarah's glance followed hers and she reached for the letters and handed them to the girl.

" None from Bart," Penny said and tried to make her voice casual. " Both from Nick, bless him! " But she didn't fool Sarah and she knew it.

As Sarah Bates busied herself about the room, she eyed with affectionate concern the girl absorbed in Nick's letter. Penny read aloud a portion of the first one.

" The weather has been abominable but no one seems to pay much attention to it. They're a good bunch in this outfit. We don't hear any grousing. Of course we haven't seen much yet, but we hope to before long."

Here a sentence was blocked out and he went on

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to say he had heard from his sister and she had received a long letter from Rusty and he was well.

"And where is he?" Sarah asked. "Mr. Nick, I mean. Didn't he say?"

"Somewhere in the Pacific—Australia, maybe. There are times when they can't say, Sarah. It wouldn't do, you know. Nick's a flyer. He might be anywhere. Stop fussing, you make me nervous."

"You ain't got no letter from Doctor Bart in more'n a month, have you, Miss Penny? D'you s'pose that one's got any? I bet she ain't. It's just luck you got these what with her sticking around ready to pounce the minute my back was turned. But I fooled her. I snatched 'em up right from under her nose, I did, and what's more, I kept 'em right in my pocket 'til she left the house. Curious, that's what she is." The woman flounced over to the fire and poked the glowing coals for a minute then turned and came back to stand beside Penny.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Sarah Bates," Penny said although she felt sure she did. "Whom do you mean by 'that one'? Louise Sabin? But she's engaged to Bart. And why should she be curious about him or anyone else writing to me? Surely —"

"Surely nothing," snapped the maid. "I only know she had your two letters in her hand and if I hadn't come along she'd have snitched 'em. I bet a cookie she would. I don't trust that one, Miss Penny, and

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never did. Engaged? Umph! I bet she won't land Doctor Bart. Not in the end she won't. I just feel in my bones that'll never come to no wedding. They's something mighty fishy about that whole thing — ”

“ Oh, nonsense, Sarah! ” Penny interrupted sharply. “ It has been announced. Everyone knows about it and—well, she's wearing his ring, isn't she? You saw it and I saw it and it's gorgeous—far more expensive than he could afford. Bart isn't rich, Sarah, and Louise should not have allowed him to spend all that money on a ring — ”

“ *If he did — —* ” Sarah muttered.

“ What do you mean by that? ” Penny demanded.

“ Nothing. Only watch out for that one, Miss Penny. I don't trust her.”

Penny laughed mirthlessly. “ Go along with you, you old crepe-hanger. Louise is all right—in her way. She's working hard on this war work, remember — ”

“ Working hard showing off, you mean,” Sarah amended and left the room.

Penny sat for some time staring into space, the two letters still in her lap. “ I'm no longer useless, Bart,” she murmured to the firelit room. “ They like me at the hospital. I do things I never dreamed I could do and do them with a smile. I wonder what you will think when you receive my letter about it. Will you be sorry, Bart? Will you think less of me? ”

She got to her feet and walked restlessly up and

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down the long room, pausing occasionally to gaze into the fire. Nick had ended both letters as he had certain others he had written her with the words:

"I hope you are thinking of me, Penny—loving me a little more each day. For it is you I want to come home to. You I want to spend the rest of my life with when this mess is over.

"Every time I receive a letter from you I read and re-read it searching between the lines for some word—some sign that you love me. The hope that your next letter will contain such a sign bolsters the old morale, darling. Couldn't you make it soon?"

Came a knock on the door and at her "Come in," Sarah entered.

"That one's coming back for dinner, Miss Penny," the woman told her. "And Mr. Lowell's staying too. Now do you want I should bring you up a tray?"

"Now? Why now particularly?" Penny asked, looking Sarah Bates in the eye. "Don't get ideas, Sarah," she warned her. "I'm not afraid of my lovely cousin and you know how fond I am of Uncle Stephen. Don't feel you have to be on the defensive all the time, my good woman. And while Louise and I have never been what one might call passionately devoted to each other, still, when we meet we do act like civilized people. After all, you know, she is Mother's niece and a very beautiful girl."

"Han'some is as han'some does," quoted Sarah

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sententiously. "I don't care for her, Miss Penny, and what's more I don't trust her."

"Forget it, darling," the girl said and gave the thin shoulders an affectionate pat. "I believe I'm putting on weight, Sarah. This belt is getting a little snug. See?"

"Tain't that," the maid contradicted. "It's them cleaners. No knowing how things'll come home when them cleaners gets hold of 'em. You ain't getting no fatter. You needn't to worry about that. I bet she's fishing, Miss Penny. She ain't got no letter from him neither and she wants to find out if you have. Now don't you give her no satisfaction."

Penny was busy powdering her nose and didn't answer.

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON SOME TWO WEEKS LATER that Penny was met at the door by a red-eyed, agitated Sarah who dramatically motioned toward the library from which signs of distress came. She was shaking her head violently from side to side.

"What on earth's the matter, Sarah?" Penny demanded.

"Don't go in there, Miss Penny," Sarah warned. "Wait. Go on up to your room and I'll send your ma up to tell you about it."

"But what is it? Bart?" she whispered, her face draining of color.

"It's a telegram—from the War Department. He's missing, Miss Penny—he's missing! They don't know if he's dead or alive or if them nasty Japs has got him. O-oh—don't you take on, Miss Penny—that one's doing enough for a dozen." The last was said venomously as if Sarah begrudged the right of Louise Sabin to mourn.

Penny drew away from the maid's restraining hand and entered the pleasant library. Louise was prostrate on the sofa while Mrs. Stuart sat beside her murmuring soothingly, the tears running down her own cheeks. Louise was making a thorough job of it, moaning and sobbing and writhing in an agony of sorrow. Penny was surprised and the thought flashed

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through her mind that her cousin was being theatrical—that she was putting on an act, but was instantly ashamed of the ungenerous feeling. Now she went over to the two and stood looking down at the fair head buried in the pillow.

"But there's nothing definite about it, is there, Mother?" she asked quietly. "Lots of people have been reported missing who have turned up later quite safe and sound. I have an idea Bart is quite capable of taking care of himself."

Louise raised her head and Penny saw that her eyes were quite dry. Now they sparkled with anger. "You can talk like that—you can remain calm and indifferent when Bart—Bart may even now be dead or suffering torture—hunger, thirst or worse! Oh, oh, you're hard, Penny Stuart. You're selfish as always. I—I hate you! I've—I've always hated you!" Her head went down again and she choked. "You—you didn't love him as I did. You don't know what love is. You're too selfish—too lazy—too infantile ——"

"That will do, Louise," Mrs. Stuart said with unexpected sharpness. "Just because you are unhappy is no excuse for abusing Penny. We did—we do love Bart. We have always loved him. He is like one of the family."

"But we have too much common sense and decency to make idiots of ourselves at the first word of bad news regarding him that reaches us. You're the one

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who is always reminding people there's a war on and we must all make sacrifices." Penny's voice was cold with both anger and fright. "Why don't you swallow some of your own medicine, Louise? Now's your chance to show how very brave you are—patriotic or what have you. Personally, I don't intend giving up so easily." She cast a look of scorn at her cousin and turned to her mother. "I'm going upstairs, darling. And don't let Louise upset you. Bart will come through all right."

There was bitter recrimination from the sofa and as Penny left the room she heard her mother talking sternly to Louise and heard her cousin answer that she was leaving—that there was no sympathy to be had in this house. Later, she heard the front door close and knew Louise had departed. Then she sat down beside the window and stared at nothing.

"Oh God—not that!" she prayed desperately as if a vision of Bart being tortured had come to her. "Please let him go swiftly and cleanly—not by the slow torture of being held prisoner." She buried her face in her hands and her body shook as with a chill. Footsteps approached outside her door and she knew they belonged to her mother. She ran her hand through her hair and forced herself to a semblance of calmness.

"That you, Mother? Come in." And as the older woman slipped into the room she managed to say quite casually: "I'm surprised at Louise making such

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a scene. She is always so contained and sure of herself. Why must she take the worst view of the situation?"

"She told me she was quite sure she would never see Bart again. She was obsessed with the idea. After all, she is engaged to him and I suppose they had such a short time together she feels—well, cheated, if you know what I mean," her mother explained rather lamely.

"I suppose so," Penny conceded without conviction. "But she has her war work. There's the Red Cross and the Canteen and all the rest of it that she is managing. Surely there's plenty to keep her occupied and take her mind off her own personal sorrows—if any."

Mrs. Stuart gazed at her daughter with eyes in which admiration and disapproval fought for mastery. At last curiosity got the better of both and she asked: "Aren't you shocked at the news, Penny? After all, Bart was almost like one of the family——"

"*Was*, Mother? He *is* like one of the family. Bart isn't dead—yet. Why will you and Louise persist in burying the poor fellow before he's dead? I think it's being very silly. Now run along and powder your nose, darling, while I change. I'm starved tonight and I hope we are having something special."

Mrs. Stuart bent to kiss her daughter before she left the room. "If I didn't know you so well, my

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darling, I should be almost afraid you were getting hard and unfeeling—all this hospital work ——”

“ So that's what my dear cousin said before she left, is it? Why do you listen to her? Let me tell you something. This hospital work, as she calls it, has done wonders for me. It has given me self-reliance—poise and happiness—a joy in service I never knew existed in the world. Do you know what they used to say of me—your precious daughter, Mother? That select group in which I moved? ‘ Sweet and lovely—oh, definitely ornamental, but I assure you quite—quite useless.’ Yes, they did, Mother, and I didn't care—I think I was even a little bit proud of it. Can you imagine that? Well, no one can say that with truth now, Mother. I'm useful—I'm practically indispensable and it's a grand feeling, darling! No matter what happens in the future, I can find something to do to help. Never again shall I be the lazy, good-for-nothing parasite I was before last October.”

“ October, Penny? ” her mother asked. “ But what happened in October ——”

“ That's when I became a Nurse's Aide, darling,” Penny explained hastily. “ It marked a red letter day in my life and in spite of my dear cousin's innuendoes, I shall continue to work in the hospital until this war is over—and after, perhaps.”

“ Yes, you have changed, my dear,” her mother said musingly, “ and I truly think it is an improvement. You have done me good, Penny. I, too, shall

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look on the bright side of this and think Bart will come through."

She went out and Penny smiled wryly at the reflection in her mirror. "Quite an actress, Penny Stuart," she jibed. "And right now you want to bury your head in your pillow and howl." She opened a drawer in her desk and took out the picture Bart had sent her from San Francisco just before he sailed. He looked wonderful in his uniform and Penny's eyes smarted with repressed tears as she gazed at the loved face. As she returned it to the drawer she uncovered a picture of Nick Marshall standing beside his plane, one hand raised in farewell. Dear Nick! Involuntarily she lifted a hand to her brow in salute. "Good luck, Nick!" she whispered and closed the drawer. "God bless you!"

On the front page of the *Wellsport Courier* next morning there appeared a picture of Doctor Barton Ames in the uniform of a first lieutenant and above it the ominous word: "MISSING!" Followed an account leading up to the disappearance of the young surgeon and his pilot, one Jeremy Westcott who hailed from North Dakota. They were carrying medical supplies to a base somewhere in New Guinea but had failed to reach their destination or to return. Although searching parties had been sent out in an effort to locate them, nothing had been seen nor heard from the missing pair. Three weeks had

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elapsed and both plane and occupants were to be considered lost. Relatives had been notified and the War Department and the entire nation extended sincere sympathy to the bereaved families. There was a brief biography of Doctor Ames and of the pilot and at the very end the statement that Doctor Ames was affianced to Mrs. Louise Orcott Sabin, widow of the late Gordon Sabin of this city.

Sarah Bates left the room hurriedly as Mrs. Stuart finished reading the account aloud. Penny sat with bleak, unseeing eyes, her face pale and her body rigid. A stifled sob startled her into an awareness of her surroundings. She bit her lip and forced herself to relax.

"I can't read anything definite in that account, Mother," she said firmly. "I read about a man who had been lost somewhere in the wilds of Burma, I think it was, for six weeks and he managed to get back to his own company. Oh, he was much the worse for wear—thin and dirty and unshaven, but after hospitalization he came out all right. I believe he has even written or is going to write a book about his experiences. Three weeks isn't so long. Bart will come through, you'll see."

"Poor Louise," sighed her mother, but Penny was relieved to see she was less depressed although still curiously preoccupied.

"Poor you, rather, if she decides to come here and wail on your shoulder again. Don't let her do it,

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Mother. Be out—go somewhere, but don't let her make a shock absorber of you."

Sarah had re-entered the room and stood for a moment behind Mrs. Stuart's chair. Her nose was red and her eyes looked swollen as from weeping but her tongue was sharp as ever.

"‘A bawling cow soonest forgets her calf,’ is what Pa used to say and I guess it’s the truth all right. That one’ll have a swell time being brave. You’ll see. Want I should get you a hot roll, Mrs. Stuart? These are cold’s a stone.”

“No, thank you, Sarah,” Mrs. Stuart murmured. “I’m really not at all hungry this morning.”

“Starving yourself ain’t going to help Doctor Bart none,” the maid reminded her as she removed the cold rolls from the table. She was through the swing door before her mistress could answer.

“I see what you mean, Penny,” she mused aloud. “Sarah very definitely does not care for Louise. Strange I never sensed it before.”

Penny said nothing. She was trying to erase from her mind a picture of a plane down somewhere in the jungle with two bodies trapped in the ruins, maimed or dead—perhaps never to be heard from again.

“Is it this morning you are on duty, dear, or this afternoon?” Mrs. Stuart asked, pouring hot coffee into her cup. “Why are you staring into space? Did you hear me?”

Penny started and forced a smile. “What was it,

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darling? I am only half awake, I'm afraid. Oh, the hospital. No, not this morning. I go on at two and work until six. We'll have a nice long quiet evening to ourselves, unless Uncle Stephen is coming. Is he, Mother?"

She saw the slow pink creep into her mother's cheeks and smiled. "My dear," her mother began nervously, "I have been meaning to ask your advice about something."

"All right," Penny said. "It is yours for the asking, darling. What's troubling you?"

"Would you object if Stephen and I ——" She frowned as Sarah came in with fresh rolls. "I said I didn't want any more rolls, Sarah," she reminded the maid.

"I thought maybe Miss Penny might like one and some fresh coffee ——" She looked expectantly, almost pleadingly at the girl and offered the plate. "See, they are fresh from the oven and I brought up a jar of grape jam ——"

"You're sweet, Sarah," Penny said smilingly. "I will have one though I suppose I shouldn't. I love grape jam and, Mother, may I have another cup of coffee?"

"*Another* cup!" Sarah sniffed. "You didn't drink your first one. Wasn't it all right? Ain't it strong enough for you? I told Maggie she was getting altogether too skimpy lately. It's all right to be patriotic but they's a limit to everything, sez I."

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"Now, Mother," as Sarah left the room, "what was it you wanted to confide in me? Was it that you and Uncle Stephen think of getting married—to each other?"

"Why, Penny! How did you guess? I'm sure there has been nothing—we have never ——"

"Stop being embarrassed, Mother. I've known for months it was bound to come. I think it's wonderful. Uncle Stephen's a lamb. I'm immensely fond of him," Penny spoke sincerely.

"Are you, dear? I'm glad. Your father loved him, too. I think that is one reason why I consented—I seemed to feel that your dear father would approve. In spite of your devotion, darling, there have been times when I have been lonely."

"Have you, Mother? Then I'm happy that you have decided to take Uncle Stephen. When are you planning to have the wedding?"

"Sometime after Easter, unless you think it too soon."

"Don't be silly," her daughter chided. "A spring wedding will be lovely. Does Louise approve?" She asked the last mischievously.

"Louise? What an odd thing to ask, Penny! What right has she to either approve or disapprove?" Mrs. Stuart was somewhat startled.

Penny grinned impishly. "Well, she seems to feel she has the right to criticise everything we do as if we were morons or something."

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"Now you're being silly, Penny. It's just that Louise has been spoiled—too much attention paid her. Then, too, she has been her own mistress for several years now and feels herself an authority on every subject. It was a distinct shock to me to see her go to pieces yesterday. It wasn't like her. She has always been so poised, so self-reliant and sure of herself. She must love Bart very dearly."

Penny said nothing and her mother gazed at her downcast eyes with a troubled heart. Somewhere, back in her mind, there lurked the fear that her beloved girl had been hurt by Bart's unexpected engagement to Louise Sabin. Somehow she had always had the hope that Bart and Penny would eventually marry—he had always seemed like a son—especially since the death of his own mother, and had appeared to adore Penny. She sighed audibly and Penny looked up.

"Gracious, what a sigh, Mother! Better have one of these fresh rolls. They're delicious!"

"They're just like the first ones," her mother reminded her, "and if they are so delicious, why aren't you eating yours?"

"I am," the girl said hastily and spread a portion of the crusty bread with jam and popped it into her mouth. Sarah came in with the first mail. Penny left the table and moved to a sunny window with her letters. Mrs. Stuart took hers and went to the library where she sat down at a desk and pulled a telephone

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toward her. Stephen would be happy to hear that Penny approved their plans. How pleasant to tell him the good news this early in the morning!

Penny was reading a letter from her grandfather's housekeeper, Mrs. Seeley. The letter was full of local news. Captain Jonas was fixing his boathouse down on the shore—painting it red, white and blue. Oh, he was most patriotic. Rosie had another lot of puppies and they were all spoken for already—the whole five of them. Rosie always had such cute little tykes. The house up the road where the Mannings had lived one summer was sold to a man in New York. He was remodeling it. Seemed like she couldn't bear to even look at the place since Pudgey was drowned. She had never felt the sea to be treacherous before; but now it seemed always to be lying in wait for some innocent one to get into its clutches. Maybe she was getting old but on stormy nights she could hear that child crying. Yes, she could.

The letter went on for another page along the same vein and Penny laid it aside and sat back, her eyes on the garden where Sam Ward was raking leaves from around shrubs and away from bulbs which were trying desperately to find an out. Once again she and Nick Marshall sat on the shore and a stormy youngster of about three came running down the sand, sobbing as if his heart would break. Nick picked him up and dumped him into Penny's lap and

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she had rocked him into quietness. Now she shuddered as in fancy she saw him fighting the heavy sea that had him in its grip, until completely exhausted he had at last given up the unequal fight and been swept far out—never to be returned. That part was almost unbelievable to her as it had been to the fishermen who searched for the body. She had been away at the time but had been so upset upon hearing of the tragedy that somehow the shore had never been so attractive again.

Penny put the letter into its envelope and got to her feet. The world was full of tragedies—of sorrow and unhappiness. One had only to spend a day or two at Good Samaritan to see plenty. No, she could not possibly get away as Mrs. Seeley wanted. She appreciated their loneliness with so many members of the household gone, but it just couldn't be helped. Perhaps Mother and Uncle Stephen could get up there for a while this summer. She would mention it to them later. Again it occurred to Penny as it had often before that it was strange Louise never visited her grandfather. After all he was her grandparent as much as he was Penny's. But when the subject was broached to Louise she always had an excuse why she could not make the trip. Louise called him an old fossil who had long outlived his usefulness; but she was careful not to express her opinion quite so bluntly in her aunt's presence. Perhaps now that she was so sunk over Bart's disappearance she might go up there just

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to get away from everything. Penny hadn't an idea that she would; but felt the thought was worth following up. If Louise did go up to Maine it would please the old man and probably brighten the summer for Mrs. Seeley and the others. She made up her mind to speak to her about it the first chance she got.

As she went down the hall to the stairs, Penny heard the soft voice of her mother still at the telephone. There was a lilt in it that had been absent for a long time. Penny's smile was almost maternal. Dear Mother! Penny hoped she would be very happy.

"DID YOU HEAR ABOUT LOUELLA DEAN, STUART?" Helen Reed asked as she fell into step with Penny as they entered the hospital one morning. "I think it's a rotten shame it had to happen to her. The poor kid!"

"Tell me," Penny urged. "I've been so busy lately I haven't had much time for anything else. What happened to her? Nothing about Mac, I hope. It would break her heart."

"That's just it. It is about Mac. Killed in action."

"Oh, no!" Penny cried horrified.

"It's true. She got word last night. She isn't working today—all in, I guess. Pretty tough—in her condition, too." Helen eyed the girl beside her from beneath lowered lids.

"Her condition?" Penny was puzzled. "What do you mean? Is Louella sick?"

At the other's derisive laugh, she colored. "O-oh! You mean she is going to have a baby? How wonderful for her! No-o, I suppose it isn't—now, and yet—"

"Don't be a dope, Stuart. How could it be wonderful for her without a cent to bless herself with—her family at outs with her and her husband dead?" she demanded. "Be your age."

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"Is her family angry with her? How do you know? Did she tell you?" Penny asked.

"She didn't have to tell me. I could see by the way she spoke of them. Poor kid! I wonder what she will do now. It's certain she won't be able to work much longer."

Penny stopped in her tracks. "Excuse me, Reed. I've got to see Miss Williams."

"Okay," the other said and went on to register.

Penny found the superintendent in her office and asked if she had heard about little Mrs. Dean. Miss Williams had and felt very, very sorry. She had sent word that the girl was to feel free to call upon her for anything she might need or any help that was within the power of the hospital to give.

Penny nodded. "That was kind, Miss Williams," she said. "Did you know she is going to have a baby?"

"Yes," the superintendent replied, "and we have been considering the advisability of releasing her."

"What I came for," Penny began impulsively, "is—well, I want to go to her. Will it be all right if I go now? I'll make it up either by coming on this afternoon or this evening. I know how terribly busy and short of help we are here, Miss Williams; but I feel Louella needs me. You see, she is very much alone."

"Why, of course it will be all right, Stuart. It is kind of you to want to help her. I will explain to

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Bryan in Pediatrics where I understand you are to be sent and I am sure Mrs. Dean will be glad to see you. Poor child! It is very hard to lose a loved one."

Penny left the hospital and caught a cross town bus to the Y.W. where she asked to be shown to Louella's room. The girl at the desk demurred. Mrs. Dean was seeing no one. She was terribly upset.

"I'm sure she is," Penny said softly. "I'm her friend. We are both Nurse's Aides at Good Samaritan Hospital. I'm sure she will see me if you will tell me which is her room."

She knocked at the door but received no response. At last she called softly: "It's Penny, Louella. Penny Stuart. Will you let me in?"

The door opened and a white-faced girl stared at her as if she couldn't quite make out who she was. Then, when Penny entered and held out her arms, the girl went into them and buried her head in Penny's shoulder. Not a word was spoken but long, tearless sobs shook the tortured body, racking it cruelly. Penny held her close.

"I had to come, dear," she whispered. "I know what you must be suffering. We are all so very sorry. But at least Mac is safe. We don't know about Bart. Better be dead than tortured in some filthy prison camp or left to rot in a jungle. Oh, darling, you are so much luckier than I am. *I* don't know. *You* do."

"Bart?" the other questioned. "But you said —"

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"I know. I loved him, Louella. He looked upon me as his little sister. He's engaged to my cousin. I didn't have even the two days you had. And now—he is missing—missing! Oh, my dear—there are so many worse things than death ——"

Louella brushed a tired hand across her eyes. "I know, Penny. I've told myself that and a hundred other things that are supposed to help; but somehow they don't. He was so happy about the baby, Penny."

"Of course. Shouldn't you go home, Louella? Shouldn't your parents know ——"

The girl shook her head. "I can't go home, Penny. My father told me if I married Mac he would never forgive me."

"And your mother?"

"My mother died when I was a little girl. Myrtle is my stepmother and what Father says goes. No, I'll not go home."

"Has Mac any people?"

"In Montana. But I have never met them. He hadn't been home in years. I can't go to them now. Anyway, I can still work, Penny. I'm strong—only, this has sort of knocked the props from under me." Her eyes closed and she shuddered violently, then stiffened and swallowed hard. Never in her life had Penny felt so sorry for anyone as she did for this heartbroken, suffering girl.

"When do you expect your baby, Louella?" Penny

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asked, amazed at the ease with which she was handling things and formulating a plan whereby this brave girl could receive proper care at a minimum of cost.

"In June—late in June or early in July. Poor little son—never to know his father!" A sob caught in her throat and she shook her head as if in reproof of her own weakness.

"I've got an idea, Louella," Penny said eagerly, her plan, complete to the smallest detail, at her tongue's end. "Do you know anything about Maine—at all? You don't?" as the other shook her head in bewilderment. "Then you have a grand surprise in store for you because it's just about the most wonderful place in the world. You know, I used to be a terribly sickly girl and Mother and Dad took me everywhere in the hope of benefiting my health; but it wasn't until I began spending my summers at Grandfather's that I showed signs of improvement and you can see for yourself that I'm husky enough now."

Louella sat watching the speaker, only half comprehending what was being said. But she liked to listen to Penny's voice. There was something arresting about it.

"Just the other day I got a letter from Mrs. Seeley, Grandfather's housekeeper, and she implored me to come up this summer as they are all so lonely—no young people in the house—most of the help

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gone—working in war plants or fighting overseas and they—those who are left—are fit to be tied. When I heard you were ill and—well, about the baby coming, I felt I had the solution to your problem and theirs and mine too. You are to go to Grandfather's in my place. You'll love it and they will love you and when your baby comes Mrs. Seeley will take care of you both and adore doing it."

Louella shook her head. "But I couldn't do that, Penny," she said almost regretfully. "They don't know me—no, I can still work. Mrs. Simpson, at the bakery, told me I could work right up to the time I have to go to the hospital and Miss Williams said she would make arrangements to take me in during confinement. They have been wonderful to me at the hospital, Penny. Given me all the easy jobs—jobs with no lifting or requiring strain. Everyone has been so kind to me, and I don't see why."

"Don't you, darling? Well, I can tell you. You're sweet, Louella, and we all love you. Now listen to me," Penny persisted. "You're in no condition to work—it isn't right for either you or your baby. Mac wouldn't want you to. If it's work you want, I'm sure you can find something to do at Pine Farm—Grandfather's place. He's old, Louella, nearly eighty, and rather crotchety, but darling just the same. It's a huge house with dozens of rooms and you can be alone as much as you like. Mrs. Seeley and Mrs. Latcher, the cook, will adore having you and you

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and the baby will have the very best of care. I will run up for a weekend or a day whenever I can—which I have a hunch won't be too often—and you—you're going to be comfortable and happy there in spite of Mac not being with you. I've got everything all planned, Louella Dean, and don't you dare refuse. Go up there for the summer, anyway, and I wager you'll stay for the duration. In fact, I feel sure you'll never want to leave. You see, I know the place and I know the people. They are the world's best and there's a long private beach with the ocean right at the back door."

"But the hospital," the girl demurred, though Penny thought she read relief in her shadowed eyes. "I've signed up for the duration ——"

"But under the circumstances they will let you off, Louella, I know they will," Penny assured her, recalling Miss Williams' remarks. "Honestly, you're helping me, too; for I can't get up there for more than a day or two at a time the whole summer and I know the old darlings are going to miss me terribly and it would spoil everything for me just knowing that. Let's go see Miss Williams or would you rather I saw her for you?"

"Would you, Penny? I don't feel up to anything right now. It seems as if I just want to be let alone to think."

"And that isn't good for either you or the baby," Penny reminded her maternally. "But I'll see Miss

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Williams and come back later. I'll let you know her decision. But you know, of course, they couldn't keep you if you decided to quit—not really."

"Yes, I know," the other said, "but I did sign up for the duration and of my own accord. I wanted to help—but now—it seems as if I had given all I can—"

"Of course," Penny agreed sympathetically. "I'll have to go now. Try not to be too unhappy, darling. Remember it could be a whole lot worse and you have his child to consider."

"You're sweet, Penny Stuart," Louella whispered as the door closed. "There's no one quite like you."

Miss Williams was remarkably cooperative and Penny felt she was relieved at the easy out. After all, the hospital and its patients were her job and it was up to her to see the staff was kept at the peak of efficiency at all times.

That night Penny put in a long distance call to Mrs. Seeley. She talked and cajoled and browbeat that worthy woman until at last she agreed to everything Penny suggested. Then the girl told her she would write her in detail giving full instructions and mail the letter that night. Mrs. Seeley was to call her as soon as she had received and read the letter to assure her everything would be as planned.

It was just a week later on a bright April morning with birds singing jubilantly and crocuses brightening the brown earth surrounding the bus terminal, that

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Penny saw Louella Dean off for Boston and points north. The girl was pathetically grateful and Penny turned her footsteps homeward with a feeling of profound relief. She would speak to Uncle Stephen about hurrying through any financial help that might be available. Uncle Stephen had influence. Louella and her child would need every bit of aid they could get. Penny smiled as she recalled the last words Louella had said as she boarded the bus.

"You'll get it all back, Penny. See if you don't."

Penny had patted her shoulder and waved her on her way. "I don't expect a reward for being decent," she told herself as she stepped out, breathing deeply of the morning freshness. "It didn't cost me anything to help her out." And again she repeated the remark she had made so often before, "I hate this war!" but this time she was not thinking of herself, but of a pale, tragic girl who was bravely picking up her broken life and carrying on. She decided not to mention Maine to her cousin. Louise wasn't the sort to approve of what Penny had done.

Easter Monday was the day chosen by Mrs. Stuart for her marriage to Stephen Lowell and plans were made for a simple ceremony in the drawing-room with a small reception afterward. Penny was surprised that Louise should take such an interest in the affair. Usually she had nothing but contempt for elderly matings. Why did people in their forties and

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fifties want to marry? In her opinion it was extremely silly. But for some reason this particular union seemed to meet with her approval. She thought the idea of having Penny and Alan Lowell attend the pair a sweet arrangement. After all, they comprised the entire family so, she assured those interested, it was most fitting. Penny had the feeling Louise was acting as stage manager and resented it as she had so often resented Louise's interference in the past. But her mother was happy and excited and appeared not to notice her niece's managing, and Penny submitted with what grace she could muster though rebelling inwardly.

Louise had apparently completely recovered from her grief at Bart's disappearance and seemed to be thoroughly enjoying herself.

"They's something fishy there, Miss Penny," Sarah announced one evening as she came to Penny's room while the girl was dressing for dinner. "And I bet I know what it is."

"What are you talking about, Sarah?" Penny asked negligently, slipping into a cool blue frock. "What's fishy and why?" She wasn't particularly interested. It was probably just one of Sarah's brain storms.

"That one taking such an interest in your ma's wedding to Mr. Lowell. She's never approved of no one being happy before 'cept 'twas herself that I can remember. Just why is she cooing and fussing about

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this one? Tell me that. Something mighty fishy—mighty fishy."

"Fishy—fishy? Tell me then. You said that before. Just what is fishy and why?" Penny repeated, pausing expectantly.

"I got a hunch she wants to get Mr. Alan's pa out of the way and so tied up with matrimony he won't have nothing to say if she decides to take him—Mr. Alan, I mean—poor fella! I'd like to put a bee in his bonnet only I'd prob'ly get kicked for my pains, more'n likely."

Penny stared at the reflection of the morose Sarah in the mirror. "But—but Sarah ——" she began. "Have you forgotten she's engaged to Bart? She's wearing his ring and ——"

"Not on her left hand, she ain't. She's switched it over to the other hand, Miss Penny. I seen it when she was here this afternoon. And she ain't wearing no wedding ring neither. 'Twouldn't s'prise me a mite if she up and eloped with Mr. Alan while your ma and his pa was on their honeymoon. 'Twould be just like her—the hussy!"

Penny laughed but without mirth. She wondered if Sarah spoke the truth about the ring and yet even that might mean nothing.

"It's just a case of being off with the old love and on with the new with that one," Sarah muttered. "Mr. Alan's a nice man, too, and I hate to see her get her claws into him." She sighed lustily. "For two

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pins I'd drop a hint to his pa, only that'd sort of spoil his own wedding and I want that nothing should happen to that. They're happy, ain't they, Miss Penny—your ma and Mr. Lowell? I'm mighty glad. They're nice folks."

"Very happy," Penny murmured absently. She recalled hearing rumors of Louise being out with Alan Lowell to this dance and that dinner; this night club and that concert. She hadn't quite believed it. It didn't seem possible that Louise could want to go like that with Bart's fate so uncertain. Why, it was only a few weeks since they had received that horrible wire from the War Department. Now she turned to the maid who hovered about the room and said soothingly:

"Nothing must happen to disturb Mother, Sarah. As for Louise, don't be too gullible about anything you may hear. Didn't you see the way she took the news of Bart's disappearance? How could she even think ——"

"Humph!" Sarah grunted. "And didn't I remind you and your ma that a bawling cow soonest forgets her calf? She ain't wasting no time in mourning for a man who may never come back or might come back all smashed up. I'm sorry, Miss Penny, but it's the truth. Not that I think for one minute but what Doctor Bart'll come back safe and sound when this pesky war's over. I have a hunch and they're gen'ally right."

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Penny said nothing for a minute then smiled at the troubled maid. "Don't let's worry about Louise, Sarah. Let her marry Alan Lowell if she wants to. It's my conviction he's nobody's fool."

"That's as may be, Miss Penny," Sarah conceded gloomily, "but any man's a fool to fall for that one."

"Why do you always speak of Louise as 'that one,' Sarah?" Penny asked curiously. "It sounds sort of sinister, as if ——"

"And why shouldn't it, pray? She treats me like dirt and I'll have her know I'm just as good as she is—maybe better, even if she is your ma's niece. Your ma can't help that. I got ears and I got eyes and I seen and heard some funny stunts that one's pulled off in my day. Out home we had a poor critter—sort of what they called 'teched'—she thought she was a princess and used to call my father 'my good fellow' and my mother 'good mother' when they took stuff to her. All the neighbors sort of looked after her and she wasn't the least bit grateful. Not her. She'd order them to put their donations on a table or bench and say, haughty as a peacock: 'That will be all; my good fellow—close the gate after you.' There wasn't no gate. Everyone felt sorry for her. I don't think anyone ever called her by name. They spoke of her as 'that one' or 'poor soul.' She didn't like us young'uns and would yell 'Be gone!' whenever she see any of us peeking through the hedge at her. And she was so haughty and fearsome that we skedaddled

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without no back talk neither. That one always reminded me of her—they had the same name, too."

Penny laughed and patted Sarah's shoulder. "Never mind, darling," she said placatingly. "After she marries Alan—if she does—we won't be seeing much of her. She doesn't like Uncle Stephen, you know, and he will be here all the time."

"I know," Sarah agreed, brightening, "and it'll be grand to have a man in the house again. I sort of hoped Mr. Alan would live here, too; but that one will take care of that." She left the room and Penny finished dressing and went downstairs to dinner. Sarah's hunch slipped her mind and it was several days before she thought of it again.

Mrs. Stuart and Stephen Lowell were married as planned and left immediately for Sea Isle, Georgia, for a two weeks' stay. It was the Saturday following and Penny sat at breakfast, eating little and reading the first batch of mail that Sarah had placed beside her plate. The woman was acting excited this morning, lingering in the room and at last picked up the morning edition of *The Wellsport Courier* and folding it conspicuously, laid it beside the letters. Penny looked up curiously.

"What's the matter, Sarah? Something on your mind?"

"It ain't on my mind any more, Miss Penny," she said almost triumphantly in an I-told-you-so tone.

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"It's right smack there in the paper. Look!" She pointed to pictures of Louise Sabin and Alan Lowell suggestively enclosed within a huge wedding ring.

"Well, I never!" Penny exclaimed as she read the account of her cousin's marriage. "You're positively psychic, Sarah."

"I got eyes, Miss Penny, and I got ears and I wasn't born yest'dy neither. Won't his pa be madder'n hops, though? He hates that one. You see, they went to Sea Isle, too, didn't they? The nerve of her!"

"Oh, I'm sorry," Penny said. "I hope they won't meet. I don't want anything to spoil Mother's pleasure and Louise ——"

"I know," Sarah said. "You don't need to tell me nothing about that one. Anyway, cheer up, Miss Penny. Doctor Bart's got out of her clutches. Sometimes they's good comes out of evil," she announced sententiously.

"Oh, I forgot," Penny cried. "Poor Bart! Suppose he's injured or ill and hears about this. How awful!"

"Awful nothing," Sarah muttered. "If he ever heard he was engaged to her it will be a big relief to him to know he ain't. You mark my words, Miss Penny. They ain't nothing will make him want to live and get home more'n knowing he ain't tied up to that one—for keeps. And if he's dead and gone to glory, I bet a dollar he's slapping hisself on the back right

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up there in Heaven to think she ain't got no hold on him."

" You don't care for her, do you, Sarah? " Penny said superfluously, her mind conjuring up a picture of Bart dead. She bit her lip and went on hastily, " You don't have to answer that, Sarah. I know you don't."

" You said a mouthful that time, Miss Penny," Sarah said. " You're dead right I don't and I don't care who knows it."

PENNY STOOD BESIDE A BED IN ONE CORNER OF THE children's ward and gazed down on the flushed face of the small boy lying there. There was something hauntingly familiar about that curly red-gold hair and the thick dark lashes just now lying against the feverish cheek. From time to time muttered and quite unintelligible words slipped from the slightly parted lips. He was somewhere between four and five, Penny thought, and she had the feeling she had talked with this youngster and had once upon a time held him in her arms. But his name was quite unfamiliar to her. It puzzled her and she mentioned the fact to the nurse in charge.

"Oh, it's undoubtedly just a resemblance, Stuart," Mary Bryan said. "He's a beautiful child, I grant you. Seems made of finer clay than that used in molding his parents. They're quite ordinary—decidedly lower class. But they certainly adore that child and are here during every minute of the time allowed visitors. So far, he hasn't seemed to notice them although his mother croons to him and sort of pleads with him to recognize her."

"Will he get well, Bryan?" Penny asked. "Is the concussion really serious? I wish I could recall where I had seen him. I'm sure —"

"Here comes his mother—alone, this time. Can

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you imagine her bearing a child like him? How do you do, Mrs. Purdy? No change. Please don't try to rouse him ——”

The woman sank into the chair beside the bed and her avid gaze devoured the baby face. Penny watched her surreptitiously. No, she had never seen this woman before, but the boy —— It was very annoying. The idea that she knew him persisted. She busied herself with the other patients, bathing, massaging, amusing, feeding, but her eyes kept straying back to the partly screened corner where Mrs. Purdy sat, her thin body bending slightly toward the bed. The child seemed to be associated in some way with Nick Marshall in her mind. Then it must have been during the summer. Suddenly, a light broke and she gasped. The little girl with her leg in a cast looked up questioningly.

“It doesn’t hurt any more, Nurse,” she announced placatingly. “I mean—not much. It gets sort of prickly sometimes but it doesn’t hurt any more—not really hurt,” she repeated, as if reassuring Penny. The girl smiled at the child.

“You’re very brave, Dotty,” she said softly. “We are all so proud of you! Which of your children do you want with you this morning and which ribbon shall I tie on your curls? The pink one? That’s your favorite, isn’t it? But Daddy will be in to see you this afternoon, won’t he, so perhaps we’d better save the pink one for his visit. Shall we?”

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The little girl nodded happily. "I love my daddy, Nurse," she sang. "Isn't he a nice daddy?"

"I'm sure he is," Penny replied automatically never having noticed the man. "Now I must go help Bonny with her hair. It hurts to have it combed but she is going to be a brave girl and not cry a bit, aren't you, darling?"

"I don't think so," Bonny said, her mouth stubborn. "I always cry. Are you going to hurt like—like that other one does? I don't like her. She called me a cry-baby. Ouch! I'm going to cry——"

In the next bed Dotty began to sing to her doll. She had a high sweet voice and sang the same words over and over again.

"Shut up, you!" Bonny ordered petulantly. "I don't like you to sing while I'm crying. It—it—hurts worse then. Ouch! I'll cry, I will."

Once upon a time Penny Stuart would have no doubt told her to go ahead and cry if it would make her feel better; but now she began telling a story—one she remembered relating to a small boy who had wandered down the beach to where she and Nick sunned themselves in the warm sand. He was sobbing bitterly and dragging a harness from which he had partially freed himself. Nick had picked him up—held him close for a moment and then dumped him into Penny's lap where she rocked him into quietness while she crooned a marvelous story about babies, small boys and numerous imaginary creatures until

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the wet eyes closed and the long dark lashes lay against his plump baby cheeks. She was still holding him when the boy's mother—a Mrs. Manning from up the road—came running frantically in search of him. She was a pretty young woman, slender and attractive in sweater and slacks. Now she dropped exhausted beside them and reached hungry arms for her baby.

"I'll never forgive myself," she cried. "I was up most of the night with Sheila who has somehow managed to get a bad case of hives, and I didn't realize I was so completely worn out. Pudge"—that's what she called him—"Pudge insisted on coming down to the shore. The maids were all busy so I came with him. He was doing some engineering feat and letting the water run into the canal he had made and I suppose the quiet and the sound of the waves against the seawall down below sent me to sleep." She pressed the baby to her and buried her face in his red-gold curls. "He has an apparently incurable habit of running away," she explained. "But I thought he couldn't possibly get into the water because I kept tight hold of the lines of his harness." She laughed dubiously. "I suppose my clasp relaxed when I fell asleep. I didn't miss him until a minute ago. Something woke me and—oh, I was so terribly frightened! If only he could be made to understand how naughty it is to run away!"

Penny hadn't seen much of Mrs. Manning for the

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rest of the summer. Mr. Manning, an engineer, was doing transport flying and Penny never saw him at all. Eight-year-old Sheila and Pudge were on the shore every day and sometimes came over to the private stretch of beach belonging to Penny's grandfather. Then one day—tragedy! A three-day storm swept the Maine coast, tossing bits of wreckage and debris of all sorts up on the well-kept beaches of the summer residents. Penny had gone to a nearby town to shop and visit a friend of her mother's who was passing through and her visit lasted the duration of the storm. It was on the day of her return that she heard of the drowning of Pudge Manning. He had left the house undetected and wandered down to the shore. His sweater, which he could never quite succeed in getting into alone, was caught on a partly submerged log and one small shoe bobbed up and down several yards from shore.

When all hope for the recovery of the body had been abandoned, the grief-stricken Mannings went back to Chicago and Penny forgot them. But surely the boy in that corner bed was Pudge Manning. What had happened to him? Just how had this boy, known here as Richard Purdy, come by this concussion? She determined to find out.

"He ran away," Mary Bryan told her. "It seems it's a habit of his, and was knocked down by a truck. It was a mercy he wasn't crushed to a pulp. If the driver hadn't used his head he would have been. As

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it is, he has a broken arm and this bad concussion. We were afraid his skull was fractured at first. Fortunately, it wasn't. He's been unconscious two days already and should be coming around almost any time. Personally, I think he should be in a private room but his parents—odd sort of people—want him here with other children. They appear to be devoted to him and yet —”

“ Do you feel that way, too? ” Penny asked.

“ What way? Just what are you thinking, Stuart? ” the nurse demanded.

“ I don't exactly know, ” Penny said slowly. “ But I wish he would open his eyes. Somehow I feel sure I know that youngster but not by the name of Purdy.”

Mary Bryan laughed. “ We get all sorts of queer things here, Stuart; but I think this is just a case of mistaken identity.”

“ Perhaps, ” Penny conceded reluctantly. “ But if it's the boy I remember, I feel sure he will recognize me even though he couldn't have been more than three when I last played with him. He adored me then—and —”

“ Don't bank on it, Stuart, ” the nurse warned her. “ You're very likely wrong about the boy and even if it should be your little friend it isn't at all reasonable to suppose a four-year-old would remember something that happened more than a year ago. Even if he does, what then? What will it prove? ”

“ I don't know. You see, he was supposed to have

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drowned —— Oh, I'm being silly, I suppose; but I have the strangest feeling about him, Bryan. You see, the body was never recovered—or I never heard that it was ——”

“Forget it,” was the nurse's advice. “Those things happen only in books, my dear.” But as she went on about her work, she, too, kept a wary eye on the bed in the corner and the woman who sat leaning forward as she watched the face of the boy on the pillow. At last she walked over and laid a gentle hand on the woman's shoulder. With a strangled cry, the woman swung around. “Oh, I'm sorry if I startled you,” Mary Bryan murmured, surprised at the other's nervousness.

“Oh, that's all right. I'm just sort of jittery, I guess,” Mrs. Purdy explained, straightening her hat and pressing a work-worn hand to her lips to still their trembling. “When do you think I can take him home, Nurse?” she asked.

“Not for some time, I'm afraid, Mrs. Purdy,” Bryan answered, thinking of Penny's story. “Even after he regains consciousness he will need special care and nursing. We shall have to watch him very closely. It was a very bad concussion—a very close call.”

The woman's pale eyes filled with tears. “We love him so,” she whispered. “He's all we've got and we waited so long for him. It would kill us if anything happened to him. I could take care of him, Nurse.

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After all, his mother is the proper one to take care of him. I want to take him home —” She spoke stubbornly, as if she would do it immediately.

“ But you can't do that, Mrs. Purdy,” Mary Bryan told her sharply. “ If you did he would surely die. No, he must stay here until he is entirely recovered. And I really think it would be better if you didn't come to the hospital so often. You see, I feel sure you disturb him. You are so overwrought and nervous that it communicates itself to your son. That often happens, you know. Parents don't realize it but very often they hinder rather than help recovery. I would suggest that you didn't come again until the boy is conscious. We'll let you know. It really is best, Mrs. Purdy. You can trust us to take every care of Richard. He's a lovely child and I know how devoted you are to him. Now run along and go shopping—buy yourself a new hat or something to take your mind off your boy's condition.”

“ Hat! ” the woman sniffed, staring suspiciously at the nurse. “ And what's the matter with this hat? ” She snatched it from her head and stared at it, turning it round and round in her hands.

Mary Bryan laughed. “ Why nothing's the matter with it if you like it. But when we nurses are upset or jittery or blue or discouraged we usually buy a new hat. It's a woman's infallible remedy for the blues, you know:”

“ Why do you want to get rid of me? After all,

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Richard's my son. I have a right to be here and no one is going to stop me—I'll take him out of here ——”

“Don't be silly,” Mary said evenly, although her pulses quickened and her suspicions grew. “I'm thinking of the boy. You say you will die if anything happens to him. Well, we are trying to see that nothing does. Now run along and help us keep Richard quiet and free from all disturbances, mental and physical.”

The woman reluctantly withdrew and the nurse watched her with mixed thoughts. There was something very suspicious about her actions. Or was it because of Penny Stuart's story that she thought so? She hesitated to recount her experience to Penny lest the girl go off the deep end and start something she couldn't finish. And yet if this boy was really the Manning youngster, how wonderful for his parents!

It was late that same afternoon and Penny, who had been on duty most of the day owing to the absence of Betty Hudson who had the afternoon trick and was suffering from an obstreperous wisdom tooth, was about ready to register out when Mary Bryan stopped her.

“Come over here a minute, Stuart,” she said. “I want to ask you something. Suppose the Manning boy wasn't drowned. Is there any way you could get his mother here without raising false hopes? Would she make the trip from Chicago, I think that's where

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you said she lived, on some pretext or other? How would you go about it?"

Penny's eyes were enormous with excitement. "What happened? Have you a clue? Has he recovered consciousness? Let me go over to him now!"

Mary shook her head. "Nothing like that. He's just the same, but his mother—Mrs. Purdy—acted sort of queer. Perhaps it's what you told me that set the old imagination working overtime; but there's something fishy in that set-up and I'd like to know what it is. If that woman is that boy's mother then I'm a crocodile's aunt. I was going to ask her if he was her own child but she intimated that he was—the child of their middle age, apparently. She said they had waited for him so long. I don't care for it, Stuart. It scares me. What do you think? What would you do?"

"If he would open his eyes I should know definitely. I'm sure he would recognize me. Is there any way you could keep him here until I find out if Mrs. Manning will come on East. Perhaps Mother could help—invite her for something. I don't even know if she is still in Chicago. Perhaps Sarah would know. She was friendly with one of their maids and was there often after the supposed drowning. I'll see what I can do and tell you tomorrow. Oh, Bryan, wouldn't it be wonderful if it really is Pudge Manning—I mean for his mother?"

"Yes, but this Mrs. Purdy thinks her eyes of the

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boy," Mary murmured worriedly. "What about her?"

"If she kidnapped him ——"

"She may not have. He may have wandered off and she and her husband picked him up. Kids do run away, you know, and from all accounts this youngster is given to that sort of thing."

"Mrs. Manning told me Pudge did the same thing. In fact that's how I came to meet the family. Pudge ran away. He was such a lovable child, Bryan, and made friends with everyone. Perhaps that was it. Perhaps they were passing through and picked him up ——"

"That's all right, Stuart," the nurse said, musingly, "but the fact remains they knew he wasn't theirs and they knew some mother must be frantic over his loss. It must have been in the papers or wasn't it?"

"I suppose it was. I really don't know. Anyway, they should have known a child like Pudge had been carefully brought up. He was such a darling, Bryan. I was crazy about him, and so was Nick."

"Nick? Who is Nick? I haven't heard about him. Blushing, Stuart? What branch of the service?"

"Air," Penny replied. "Nick's a pilot—somewhere in the Pacific. The Marshall place and my grandfather's were quite close—that is—their beaches joined. Nick's sister is an aide, too," she explained hastily, hoping to change the subject.

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" You know, Stuart, I've wondered about you. It isn't in the cards that a girl of your type—of your background—would choose hospital work rather than something more spectacular such as Red Cross, Canteen or something that would bring her into direct contact with service men. We don't get army patients here—too far inland and then with the Army and Navy Hospital only two hundred miles away, they naturally would not come to Good Samaritan. We work you hard, you aides, and I wondered why you chose this particular branch of the service. Of course Nick's the answer. Well, all I can say is—you're a lucky guy, Nick Marshall, and I wish your influence could have extended to a hundred more gals like our Penny Stuart."

Penny was tempted to tell Mary Bryan that it wasn't Nick who had influenced her; but something held her back. After all, what did it matter? Nearly everyone here had someone in the service. She might as well be classed with the others. Suddenly Nick's face became very clear to her. "I want you to be my girl," he had said in that first letter. "I want you to write to me, think of me and pray for me." Well she had done all three; but she couldn't be his girl when her whole being cried out for Bart Ames.

" Did you know Joel Rankin leaves for camp tomorrow, Stuart? " the nurse asked after a pause during which Penny moved toward the door. " Mcclusky's looking quite woebegone. I knew you had

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met the lug and thought you might be interested. Something tells me there's an understanding between those two. Have you heard anything?"

"No," Penny replied, "but I think it is splendid if it's true. I knew they went out together —"

"Gosh!" the other exclaimed in exasperation. "Ruth used to be fun and we palled together for years until this Rankin critter hove in sight. Oh, well, she's a grand girl and I hope he comes back all in one piece."

"I hope so," Penny agreed and shuddered as a quick memory of Bart Ames flashed before her mind's eye. Where was he now? She closed her eyes and turned away. "Good night, Bryan," she said and reached for the doorknob.

"You do what you can and I'll put a bee in Arnold's bonnet to keep an eye on the parents if they appear tonight. I'm going to see Hammond and find out if he won't prohibit callers there. It might help. I keep wishing he was in a private room."

"He would be lonesome when he gets better, I suppose. But just now it would seem the right thing for him. Doesn't Doctor Hammond think so?" Penny asked.

"Oh, neither he nor Morris said much of anything when his mother—I mean Mrs. Purdy—insisted he go into the children's ward. They seemed to think it might be a question of money and didn't want to embarrass her, perhaps." Her lips curled.

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"That was sarcasm, Stuart. A lot they care how much they embarrass anyone. But I wouldn't let this go any farther, Stuart. We may be barking up the wrong tree and then it would be we who are embarrassed."

Penny went out into the afternoon sunshine. Wellspорт was very beautiful just now. Spring had lagged but now trees and shrubs were decked in tender, delectable green. Lilac bushes bent beneath the weight of purple and white blooms. Tulips and daffodils marched in orderly rows along fences and borders. Bridal wreath and spirea covered many an unsightly pile. All along the commonplace streets lawns were being mowed, rolled and reseeded. Shirt-sleeved men and women in overalls and slacks beat or shook rugs. Clotheslines still held curtains and draperies that whipped in the late afternoon sunshine. Penny took it all in with great gulps of fresh spring air. She knew none of these people—they were all quite outside the social orbit of Chestnut Place residents and yet this afternoon she felt a special kinship with them. This was America—her America! These people were living as they wanted to live, free and untrammeled. Her heart swelled with pride and her step quickened. It was good to be a part of all this—to be able to help—to be needed. How could she ever have been satisfied to stand apart—an onlooker—a parasite?

She turned into her own neighborhood and smiled as she saw Judge Newcomb raking his spacious lawn.

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Then she remembered his yard man was now in the Navy. She waved as he hailed her, his bald head shining in the sun. There was Mrs. Severance shaking a dust mop, her beautiful white hair protected by a gay red bandanna. She called to Penny and the girl stopped to chat, then hurried on toward home. House-cleaning time. America's spring house-cleaning! Oh, it was wonderful to be young and alive on a warm spring afternoon with the world and his wife shaking off the lethargy of the long winter and preparing for a time of joyous, healthful activity. In spite of all the suffering and heartbreak—in spite of the greed and selfishness—in spite of this horrible war, America was doing its spring house-cleaning and loving it.

The privet hedge that had replaced the iron fence was doing well. Penny paused to examine the fresh green leaves. She thought nearly every plant was going to live. In another year or two that hedge was really going to be something. Her own front door was open to the soft spring air and Penny ran up the steps and paused as she heard voices coming from the library. They were excited voices—her mother's and Uncle Stephen's. Sarah hurried down the hall to meet her. Her plain face was beaming while tears ran down her cheeks.

"Oh, Miss Penny," she cried, her hands against her flat breast. "He's safe—he's safe!"

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"Who?" Penny whispered although her heart told her.

"Doctor Bart—he's been rescued!"

"Is that you, darling?" her mother called. And as Penny went on to the library she exclaimed: "Such wonderful news, Penny! Sit down, dear. It will be as much of a shock to you as it was to me. I nearly fainted—from happiness."

"Let me see the message, Mother," Penny said, extending her hand for it. She read it with heart pounding and eyes smarting with suppressed tears. Just a few words but she saw only one—"Safe." "It's wonderful, Mother!" she said at last. "I knew he would come through all right."

"I know you did, darling," her mother acknowledged. "Your faith put my own to shame many times."

"I'm wondering how Louise is going to take it. She was so sure she would never see him again." Penny spoke as if to herself.

Stephen Lowell laughed and Penny thought she had never before heard a more derisive sound. "I think Alan's best out is to get into the service," he said, his back to the room. "Poor chap!"

His wife went quickly to him and Penny left the room. She, too, felt like echoing her stepfather's comment.

PENNY FOUND HER STEPFATHER IN THE LIBRARY when she went downstairs a little later. He was thumbing through a folder. His wife had not yet appeared and Penny was glad of the opportunity to see him alone.

"Want to listen to a story, Uncle Stephen?" she asked as he greeted her affectionately. "It's going to tax your credulity, I'm afraid, but I'm so sure I'm right about it that I just can't let it lie."

"Go ahead, my dear," Stephen Lowell urged, pushing aside his papers. "You know how I love mysteries."

Mrs. Lowell entered as Penny began her story and, although the girl was a little sorry, she went on explaining why she felt so sure she was right and asked what she should do about it. Her mother thought the idea preposterous. Of course it was nothing more than a chance resemblance and she didn't want Penny to become involved in anything that later might prove to be annoying. People in the Purdy class could be very vindictive and, anyway, the Manning child was dead—drowned—no question about it. His mother was convinced and his father was probably still somewhere in the war zone and could do nothing.

But, as he said, Stephen Lowell loved a mystery.

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He sat forward, eyes bright with interest, fingers folding and unfolding a paper on the table.

"Suppose it is the Manning child as Penny insists, Adelaide," he said eagerly. "What a story! I'm sorry I don't know the family, but no doubt I can find someone who does. Excuse me while I telephone?"

"Now what, Stephen?" his wife demanded. "You don't actually believe this boy to be the Manning child, do you? That he wasn't drowned at all but was probably kidnapped? Please, Stephen, don't be ridiculous."

But Stephen Lowell was already in the hall telephone booth where he was trying to reach the police sergeant in the Maine town nearest the place where the Mannings had spent that tragic summer year before last. It didn't take long and he was told that undoubtedly the child was drowned although the body had never been recovered. He was in possession of Mrs. Manning's permanent address because she was to be notified if there should be any further developments. Mr. Lowell took down the address and then called his cousin, Mrs. Pendergast, who knew everyone worth knowing, and inquired if she knew a Mrs. Bruce Manning of Chicago—Captain Manning's wife. Mrs. Pendergast did but not intimately. However, she had a friend who knew Mrs. Manning's sister. She lived in Colport. Poor Mrs. Manning had never recovered from the loss of her son. Why was

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Stephen asking so many questions? Why, yes, she thought she could get her friend to maneuver Mrs. Manning's sister into inviting her for a visit. But why? Was it a secret? Had they found the child's body? How horrible! Better let him lie buried at sea. Just reopening old wounds that would better remain sealed. But she would do her best and would let him know. Tonight? Absurd! Why the rush? When must this visit take place? Time was of the essence, was it? The whole thing was quite beyond her comprehension but she was intrigued and would call him back. How was Adelaide and was he perfectly happy? Good. The marriage had her heartiest approval.

He was smiling broadly when he reentered the library where Penny was staring out the window at the glowing garden. She thought it had never been more beautiful. Perhaps because of the fact that spring had been late in coming they appreciated it the more. From the tall elm at the end of the garden an oriole sang to his mate. Robins busily gathered bits of string and straw and flew happily away. Through the open window came the odor of freshly turned sod—the smell of grass newly cut. A tiny breeze stirred the curtains and brought the scent of lilac and syringa. Penny's throat tightened and her eyes filled with unaccustomed tears. A feeling of happiness that was close to pain flooded her heart. She turned as her stepfather entered.

"All set, my dear," he announced. "Maude will

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have the lady here within two days or my name isn't Stephen Lowell."

"Oh, Uncle Stephen!" Penny cried, her eyes shining. "You're wonderful! How did you do it? You didn't tell her that ——"

"I told her nothing, my dear, and Maude knows me well enough not to ask questions she is certain I won't answer. Mrs. Manning has a sister living in Colport—that's only about forty miles from here—and Maude has a friend who knows her. The rest is easy. I left it all to her. She will get in touch with me as soon as she has anything definite to report."

"That's what I call action, Uncle Stephen," Penny said with enthusiasm. Her mother said nothing and the conspirators glanced at her questioningly. "Don't you approve, Mother?" the girl asked.

Her mother shook her head. "I think you are getting needlessly excited. Consider that poor mother if it turns out to be a wild goose chase. How is she going to feel? Suppose the boy does look like her son. Do you think for one minute his parents will consent to give him up?"

"If he isn't her son, she won't want him no matter how close the resemblance, Mother," Penny told her.

"But I'm so sure, darling. Even Mary Bryan, the nurse, agrees there is something fishy about the relationship between those people and the child. I wish your cousin would call, Uncle Stephen." . . .

"Give her time, my dear. Maude works fast when

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she does anything but there are any number of things that might cause delay, you know."

Penny was in her room some time later when the telephone rang and she ran to lean over the baluster as she had done months before. If she remembered she gave no sign. Just now she felt the past was very far away. Only the next few days counted. Would Mrs. Manning make the trip East? And what excuse could one give for her visit to Good Samaritan?

Mr. Lowell left the booth and Penny called down to him. "What luck, Uncle Stephen?" she asked.

"Everything is working according to plan, my dear," he told her exuberantly. "The sister developed a most convenient yearning to see the lady in question and she is leaving for the East tomorrow morning. She should arrive some time in the evening and you could get in touch with her day after tomorrow. How's that for action?"

"I don't approve, Stephen," Mrs. Lowell said distinctly, but Penny returned to her room more excited than ever.

"You're feverish, Miss Penny," Sarah insisted, watching the girl as she moved restlessly about the room, rearranging articles on mantel and dressing table. "Why don't you go to bed? I could bring you up a glass of hot milk. You don't eat enough. And what was Mr. Lowell telling you that upset you so?"

"Listen, Sarah," Penny said, pausing before the anxious maid. "Do you remember Pudge Manning—

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the little boy who spent the summer near Grand-father's in Maine?"

"I ain't so old I've lost my wits entirely, Miss Penny," Sarah retorted. "And why shouldn't I remember him? Didn't I keep his poor ma from drowning herself, too? I guess I did. Well, what brought that up? They ain't found his poor little corpse, have they?"

"No," Penny said, sorry she had mentioned it and wondering just how much to tell. "You know, Sarah, I wonder if he really was drowned."

"Really drowned!" Sarah cried. "What kind of talk is that? Of course he was drowned. Didn't they find his poor little sweater and one of his shoes? Of course he was drowned. He wasn't anything but a baby, Miss Penny. Do you think p'raps he swum clear out to sea and was picked up by some ship and maybe carried off to some furrin country? Silly! You're just feverish, Miss Penny. Too much hospital work. I don't hold with it and never did. Now you just go straight to bed and I'll bring you up some nice hot milk."

"Hush, Sarah!" Penny said impatiently. "I'm not feverish and the hospital work is good for me. It just happens I saw a little boy who looks exactly like Pudge Manning and it made me think of him. That's all."

Sarah pricked up her ears. "You ain't really foolish enough to think it was Pudge, now are you,

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Miss Penny? Why, of course it ain't. How could it be? How could he have got clear down here, anyway? Is that what Mr. Lowell was talking about?"

Penny nodded, sorry she had brought up the subject. "Oh, well," she said negligently, "the resemblance was very strong, Sarah."

"Where was it you saw this boy, Miss Penny?" Sarah asked.

"In the children's ward at the hospital. He was in an accident and is unconscious from a blow on the head."

"What's his name?"

"He's listed as Richard Purdy."

"That settles it," Sarah exclaimed triumphantly. "Richard Purdy don't sound nothing like Pudge Manning, now does it? Does he live here?"

Penny nodded again. "Forget it, Sarah," she said wearily. "It was just a thought."

It was during visitors' hours next day that Sarah Bates made a trip to Good Samaritan burdened with a huge basket of fruit. She asked to be allowed to visit the children's ward. Penny exclaimed at sight of her and warned her to be careful.

"Careful's' my middle name, Miss Penny," the maid told her. "Your ma wanted I should come see for myself just what there is to this cock and bull story about a corpse coming back to life and stirring things up this way. Let me see this boy who claims

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to be Pudgey Manning. I'll know quick as I look at him."

Penny called Mary Bryan and they discussed the advisability of Sarah visiting that screened corner.

"Mrs. Purdy will probably be in any minute now and it would be unfortunate if she should find you there with him, Miss Bates," Mary told the curious maid.

"You can keep her from coming in 'til I get out, can't you? I ain't got but a minute. I got my work to do and have to get back. If you let me go in right now—I won't be more'n a split second. 'Twon't take more'n that to prove Miss Penny's barking up the wrong tree."

Sarah and Penny walked the length of the long ward, smiling and greeting the youngsters on each side of the room, Penny stopping for a word here and there while Sarah went straight on to the corner bed. She slipped behind the screen and Penny, who had paused at the next bed, heard a smothered gasp. Apparently Sarah, too, had seen the remarkable likeness.

When the maid stepped back into the open ward her eyes were wide with excitement and her usually florid face was pale. She set her lips firmly and nodded her head.

"It's him all right," she whispered and stalked from the room and Penny didn't see her again until she returned home at the close of the day.

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Mrs. Purdy arrived soon after but Penny stayed close by, her eyes watching every move the woman made. When she had stayed for nearly an hour, all the time bending above the unconscious boy, Mary Bryan arrived to tell her she must leave. The child was restless—tossing his legs and good arm about and muttering fretfully.

"You see how you disturb him, Mrs. Purdy," Mary pointed out. "We can't have that, you know. I must insist that you don't come again until we send for you. It is imperative the child have complete quiet. I wish you had allowed us to put him in a private room. But I don't think the other children disturb him as much as visitors do. You are so upset and worried, you know, that he subconsciously senses it. You understand, don't you? It is for the child's good."

"But I'm his mother, I tell you. He has always loved having me with him. I'm—I'm afraid, Nurse. You won't let him die? You won't let nothing happen to him ——"

"Of course not. Please don't worry. We shall give him every care. That's our job." Mary spoke soothingly and the woman was weeping silently as she left the ward. Suddenly, Penny felt a great sympathy for her. She put a comforting hand on her arm and the woman lifted startled eyes to her face.

"I'm sorry," Penny whispered. "But I'm sure he is going to be all right."

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"Thank you," the woman murmured and hurried away.

"Curiouser and curioser," Mary muttered as she joined Penny at the table in the corridor a few minutes later. "I'm beginning to worry about that lad. He's been out a long time. I hope the dame takes my advice and stays away for a few days. She not only disturbs the youngster but she's beginning to drive me nuts. Gosh, Penny Stuart, why did you have to stir up sleeping dogs? It's got me."

"But I couldn't help it," Penny answered. "And I assure you it has got me, too. I'll go. It's the Thorpe child, Bryan. He wants me to read the funnies to him, or the other way around. He knows them all. I wish his taste ran to something else. He's always streaking off to prevent sabotage or to rescue someone or something. He uses what he calls a 'ray gun' for the purpose of subduing the enemy—often it's a lad called Skinny McLaughlin, or some such name, who gave him a black eye once upon a time, or so the story goes. Seven years old, mind you, and already thirsting for revenge. I've borrowed Treasure Island and am going to try to interest him in that. Perhaps some of the others might like it, too." She laughed dubiously and went back inside the ward to be stopped every few steps with a request for a drink or would she tie a sash for dolly or could he have an orange—Ma left a whole bag of 'em and he wanted one right now. The nurse nodded and Penny

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peeled and quartered an orange for him and moved on down the ward accompanied by demands from Teddy Thorpe that she hurry up. He had called her first, hadn't he? If he didn't have this busted leg he'd show the bunch in here where to head in. He doubled up his fists menacingly. One or two of the little girls looked shocked, their mouths making round oh's of horror. A few boys jeered which didn't tend to calm the belligerent Teddy. But there were some of the children who ordered him to pipe down—he wasn't the only one in the hospital. Did he think he was Hitler? That brought a laugh and pantomimes and snatches from "DER FUEHRER'S FACE" sung in anything but harmony. Penny raised her hands for quiet, looking stern, and in a few minutes she was relieved to feel the ward settle down.

"What you got, Nurse?" Teddy demanded as she sat down near the foot of his bed and opened her book. "I don't want no sissy book."

"It's a wonderful story, Teddy," Penny explained, "but if after I have read a little of it you don't like it, I'll try something else."

Penny had a pleasing voice and was an excellent reader and for an hour there was quiet in the ward. It was only when it was time for trays and Mary Bryan came to minister to certain of the small patients that Penny closed the book and joined her. Followed a busy time and when at six o'clock Penny prepared to leave, the nurse sighed wearily.

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"I have another hour of this, Stuart, and I don't know how I'm going to stand it. You're lucky to get through at six. The next hour is the hardest of the entire day. It seems as if Satan enters into every small boy just before bedtime."

"I can change my hours if you like, Bryan," Penny said. "After all, it doesn't make much difference to me."

"But how about your plans for the evening? I can't spoil those."

"I don't make many. It would disrupt our schedule at home—change the dinner hour; but I imagine Mother wouldn't mind—if Maggie doesn't."

"I was only grousing, Stuart. It's all right. Run along. I'll manage until Arnold relieves me. I'm scared that the Thorpe brat will stage another mutiny. He did the other evening and I had to call the resident to talk turkey to him. These tantrums are terrible for anyone, especially one in his condition. But one can't help liking the kid. He's bright enough and I believe his toughness is just an armor to cover the pain he endures with that leg of his. I could see he was fighting tears and felt sure that was why he was taking it out on the others. Poor youngster—rheumatic heart. Morris has doubts of pulling him through. It's hard to believe it when he's on a rampage just as it's hard to believe he's only seven. Have you met his parents, Stuart?"

Penny shook her head. "He seems to have no

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visitors at all. That is, since I have been here. What are they like?"

"Both working in war plants. The father is a mild little man, the antithesis of his pugnacious son and the mother acts as if life had treated her shabbily and she was now trying to make it pay. A queer pair. That's another case where the child is a throwback to some long ago ancestor, probably. They were both here when Teddy was operated on and sat side by side in complete silence. To tell you the truth, Stuart, I believe the boy is having the time of his life here—sort of living an imaginary hero's existence. Funny kids, aren't they?"

"Indeed they are and I'm enjoying being up here with them. And I hope, as you do, they do nothing to disturb Pudge—or the boy in the corner bed. Now I must run, Bryan. See you tomorrow."

THERE WAS EXCITEMENT IN GOOD SAMARITAN Hospital. Nurses and doctors, pale and harried, worked feverishly as ambulance and taxi, private automobile and delivery truck brought in the injured. There had been an explosion at the Wellsport Arms Plant. Penny was busy in Pediatrics when word reached her that she was to report to Emergency at once. She hurried down stairs, unaware of the confusion awaiting her.

"Do just as you're told," Mary Bryan had said as Penny hesitated for a moment, uncertain how to proceed. "A doctor or nurse will tell you. Don't be scared—you can do anything anyone else can. Remember that."

Internes and doctors, nurses and students worked side by side, and as Penny entered, Ross Andrews, the newest interne, beckoned her.

"Apply these dressings to this chap, Stuart," he said curtly. "Don't be squeamish." He thrust a basin and gauze into her hands and moved on to the next patient. Penny did as directed while the sufferer stared unseeing from bloodshot, lashless eyes. His brows were gone and his front hair. His face was red and swollen—his hands and arms raw. Penny was very gentle with him, gritting her teeth to keep them from chattering. He bore her ministrations

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without a whimper and when Doctor Andrews came back he said shortly: "Here, hold these forceps—so. Don't dare move until I tell you." Penny held the forceps as directed and his fingers swabbed a wound, dressed it deftly before he muttered almost angrily: "Now come over here and help with this girl. She's pretty far gone; but we'll try to make her comfortable. Heart's bad or Hammond would have suggested immediate amputation of both legs. She's had all the morphine I dare give her."

Penny shuddered and the young man stared at her almost menacingly. "Game, are you?" he demanded. "Not going to faint or anything like that? You glamour gals lack guts ——"

"Shut up!" Penny surprised herself by saying sharply. "Where is she?"

The young man grinned wryly. "In here. Better take a deep breath and say a prayer to whatever God you worship. The poor kid hasn't long to live."

And Penny prayed not only for the shattered girl on the cot but for herself that she would not fail her. The patient couldn't have been more than eighteen—a plump, pretty girl with red hair, wide frightened green eyes and a lovely mouth, full-lipped and innocent as a child's. Penny caught the hand clutching the sheet and held it closely. Her gray eyes spoke sympathy and her lips whispered courage, and gradually the heavy lids closed while slow tears slid down the white cheeks.

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"Stay—with—me," came sobbingly. "Don't—go—"

Penny glanced questioningly at the young intern standing beside her. He nodded and let his hands drop to his sides in a gesture of futility. He moved on to the next case.

It wasn't long until the grip on Penny's hand tightened then relaxed. The eyes flew open and met her own for a brief moment before the light went out and a kindly Death released the soul from its torn and suffering body. A smothered sob was wrenching from Penny Stuart and she turned blindly away.

"Thank God she's out of her misery," Doctor Andrews muttered as he drew Penny after him to another bed. "This one isn't so tough. Cut away his clothing and get him ready for the O.R. After he's gone take the one in the corner. He goes to Men's Medical—shock. I'll be with you again by that time. God knows why they wished you onto me, Stuart. I have to tell you everything. Damn this war!"

"Double damn it!" Penny said vehemently. "And I was instructed to do as I was told—not work on my own," she reminded him. "Though no doubt I could have done as well."

The young man glared at her, then grinned. "Got you then, didn't I? Well, don't let's waste time, Stuart. Suppose you do a little aide-ing inasmuch as that's what you're here for. On your way."

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Penny was so angry she could have slapped this smart young man; but instead she moved over to the patient indicated, recorded temperature, pulse and respiration and stood by while he was moved to the elevator and taken upstairs. The man in the corner seemed to be unconscious and before she had finished making his record, he, too, was removed from the room. The girl looked about for Doctor Andrews and saw him standing at the entrance while orderlies wheeled in more of the injured. She closed her eyes for a moment. Would this ghastly procession never end?

Through the open door she glimpsed doctors and nurses working over other victims. Their uniforms were no longer immaculate. She looked down at her own and flinched as she saw it was spattered with blood. After that she worked in a nightmare—cutting away scorched and blood-soaked garments, applying compresses, holding instruments, running back and forth to supply and linen rooms—doing as she was told.

It was after the last of the injured were brought in that Doctor Andrews summoned her sharply. "Here, Stuart! On your toes. Get these ready for the wards. Send this one up to Delivery P.D.Q. Step lively—take her first. Why did they send her here?" He hurried away and Penny worked fast. Her heart was racing and she wondered if the stretcher would ever arrive. The girl lay passive except for her eyes

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which held stark terror and Penny wondered if she, too, were going to die. At last orderlies appeared wheeling a stretcher and Penny whispered encouragement to the frightened girl. She pressed her cold fingers and tried to hear what she was saying but couldn't understand. The others were routine cases. Doctor Hammond came in as she was recording the T.P.R. of the last patient and nodded encouragement.

"Pretty tough," he said as he paused beside her for a moment, "though it might have been a lot worse. The fire was halted before it did too much damage. A little more and the whole place would have gone and then we would have had real trouble. As it is, casualties weren't so heavy—three dead to date and thirty-four hospitalized—burns, mostly. Some twenty didn't require hospitalization. As it is we are at a loss where to put those who did." He sighed wearily. "Damn this war!"

"I double damned it a minute ago, Doctor Hammond," Penny said grimly.

The doctor smiled but without mirth. "Stephen Lowell's pretty proud of you, my dear," he said after a minute in which he contemplated the disheveled and emotionally exhausted girl before him. "I can quite understand it. You should take the nurses' training. I believe you are nurse material."

"I don't know," Penny demurred.

She saw Doctor Andrews eyeing her quizzically from the doorway and shook her head.

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"It's not all like this, my dear," the chief assured her. "You got a pretty big dose, I'll acknowledge, but I'm sure you swallowed it without a qualm."

"Well, at least I swallowed it," Penny said with a wry smile and the doctor moved off.

Doctor Andrews came to her. "How comes you rate conversation with the chief, Stuart?" he asked, then before she could answer, "Your face is dirty. Better go wash it and incidentally my advice to you is—don't get the notion you'd like to be a nurse. It's too tough for a gal of your tender sensibilities. But thanks for what help you could give, negligible, of course, but if we can't get what help we want we doctors have to want what we can get, or words to that effect. See you sometime, dar-ling," he finished audaciously and Penny retorted with a pertness she had never known she possessed:

"Not if I see you first, you won't," and walked away, her dark head high and her gray eyes flashing. She heard an exaggerated "Ouch!" from behind but paid no attention. She returned to Pediatrics where Mary Bryan viewed the wreckage of her smart uniform with concern.

"Bad as all that, Stuart?" she asked.

"Worse?" Penny assured her. "Do you know Doctor Andrews, Bryan?" she asked impulsively and could have bitten her tongue for asking.

"Ross Andrews? Sure. Why? Fresh interne. Did he ride you? Don't let it bother you, darling. He's too

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big for his britches. I've had a few run-ins with that smarty-pants. The only thing is, he's clever. Best interne we've ever had in these diggings—that is, since I've been here. What did he do to you?"

"Oh, nothing—much," Penny replied.

"Okay," the other said. "I can imagine. Better wash your face and—oh-oh! Here comes Donaldson ——"

"You are being relieved, Stuart," the supervisor said to Penny. "Better go home and rest for the remainder of the afternoon." Then, as if the words were dragged from her against her better judgment, she went on: "Reports on your work are quite satisfactory—we are pleased." She hurried away and the two girls stared after her.

"Well!" Mary Bryan exploded. "If that isn't a breach of ethics I'd like to know what you'd call it. The rule in this place is—'No praise no matter how deserved—plenty of censure whether merited or not.' That's the fare we've been brought up on, my dear, and so, why this sudden change of front? What happened down there in Emergency? Give, Stuart."

"I'm not going until the usual time, Bryan," Penny said stiffly.

"Gosh, gal!" the nurse exclaimed, "you can't go into this ward in the shape you're in. You're one lovely mess. Now tell me what happened."

"Oh, there were a lot of badly burned patients—a girl who had both legs crushed and died. Another

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girl who had to be rushed to the delivery room—I hope everything is all right with her. Poor thing! She was terribly frightened. Some men with bashed-in heads and broken bones—some of them were discharged after treatment though they looked pretty bad to me. And, oh, yes, several who had to be made ready for the operating room and the wards. I don't think I had nearly as many as some of the girls—the students. But I seemed to be under the direct supervision of Doctor Andrews and he didn't like it—the boor!"

"That lug thinks he rates the cream of the nursing staff, Stuart. At that, he didn't know how lucky he was," Mary Bryan soothed.

"I'm afraid I didn't do so much, Bryan," Penny replied morosely. "Somehow I felt so helpless in the face of such dreadful need. It was all so—so ——"

"You mean the girl with the smashed legs?"

Penny nodded. "She was so pretty, Bryan, and she clung to my hand until she died."

"Haven't you ever seen a person die before, Stuart?" the nurse asked.

Penny shivered.

"Of course I have and it wasn't really so bad in her case. She would have had to have an amputation of both legs so I'm sure she would have wanted it this way; but she was so young, Bryan, and so frightened and I could do nothing but stand beside her—and pray."

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Penny's breath caught and the nurse laid a comforting arm across her shoulders.

The elevator clanged to a stop at the end of the corridor and Doctor Andrews came toward them. He had shed his hospital white and was wearing a tweed suit. His blond hair waved back from his freshly scrubbed face and he was showing his fine teeth in a friendly smile.

"I'm off duty for the next two hours, Stuart, and I heard the chief tell her nibs to send you home. I don't wonder—the mess you're in. How'd you get that way? Got a coat to cover your battered appearance? You haven't washed your mug either, young lady. Scram if you want me to chauffeur you. Time's valuable and it's against rules for you to be seen in my company."

"Don't bother," Penny said stiffly. "I'm quite capable of getting myself home. Don't let me trespass on your valuable time and anyway I have no desire to break the rules—even for your company." She turned away and took a step toward the lavatory. Her heart was hammering and the blood sang in her head. Never in her life had she been so mad, she told herself. The nerve of him—the pure unadulterated gall!

"Hoity-toity," the young man murmured, quite unabashed. "These glamour gals! Mm-mm! It won't compromise you if I drive you home, Miss," he went on. "I assure you I have no least wish to cash in

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on the fact that you assisted me this afternoon. Come down off your high horse, young lady, and let's get going. You look as if you'd been loitering in a slaughterhouse. We can't risk having aspersions cast on our impeccable Good Samaritan. Now can we? Don't be long, darling. The old bus waits—down the block a piece—out of range of snoopers." He moved toward the elevator that for the moment was not in use. It was the self-service kind and was seldom still or vacant long at a time.

"Don't be a goof, Stuart," Mary Bryan whispered. "Take him up on his offer. After all, he evidently feels he owes you something. There's a raincoat hanging in the service room. Put it on. It'll at least cover you."

"He owes me nothing," Penny retorted fiercely.

When she reached the elevator he had already gone down so she used the stairs and registered out, hoping she had gotten rid of the boorish young interne. But she reckoned without the man's persistence. His shabby coupé stood at the curb not far from the hospital and he opened the door invitingly as she came down the street.

"Hop in, Lady Vere de Vere," he mocked. "Bad as it is, it's better than walking through town looking like Lady Macbeth who couldn't get the damned spot out. Where'd you get the disguise? Looks like a mother Hubbard, whatever that is. Come, get in."

Penny got in. She knew it would be quite in char-

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acter for him to keep pace with her all the way home thus making a spectacle of them both. He was the type.

"Why don't you aides change in the hospital?" he wanted to know. "I think they do in most other places—some, at least."

"I don't know," Penny replied. "Nothing has been said about it and ordinarily we don't mind. I usually wear a coat of some sort but it was so warm this noon I didn't bother. After all, what does it matter?"

"I don't suppose it does except in cases such as this," the young man agreed. "Now where to, lady? I don't happen to have your address in my little black book. But that can be quite easily remedied."

"A lot of good it would do you," Penny longed to retort but she gave her address and relaxed against the worn upholstery of the shabby car. The address seemed to mean nothing to him. When they reached the rather imposing Stuart home and she thanked him for the lift, he whistled.

"So-o, this is where you hang your hat?" he exclaimed, slipping out of the car to open the door for her. "Holy cow! Let me look at you. Then you *are* a glamour gal! I was only kidding when I accused you of it this afternoon. Well, s'long, *Miss Million-bucks*. I can see you're way out of my class. I'll not intrude on your glacial pinnacle again." As he put the car in gear he heard, for the second time that

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afternoon—heard distinctly above the roar of the motor the angry words:

“Shut up!”

Penny was glad her mother was out. It was enough to have Sarah fussing over her—exclaiming at the stains on her uniform and the dark smudges fatigue had painted beneath her eyes.

“I s’pose you got all them mill folks that was burnt and hurt in that explosion,” Sarah accused as she hovered about the room.

“Oh, we didn’t get them all, Sarah. But we had plenty. It was horrible!” She closed her eyes against the memory and pressed a hand to her throbbing temples.

“Why don’t you quit, Miss Penny?” Sarah demanded. “You wasn’t never meant for no such work as that. Here, lie back and I’ll bathe your forehead. Then I’ll bring you up a nice cup of hot tea and if you can take a nap you do it. I don’t know what your ma’ll say to this.” Her capable hands bathed the girl’s forehead and gradually the pain receded. The hot tea helped and Penny lay relaxed and quiet for a long moment. Sarah adjusted the shades and slipped from the room.

Suddenly Penny stirred and sat up abruptly. Here it was again—pampering her. She just wouldn’t have it. As it was, it had given Doctor Andrews the wrong impression. Not that she cared a scrap for him—the boor; but just the same she wanted it strictly under-

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stood that she asked no favors and expected none. She got to her feet and paced the floor of her room. Bryan was tired, too, and she had to stick. Who was Penny Stuart that she should be given special consideration? She wanted none of it. She went to her closet and took down a fresh uniform and slipped into it. She scrawled a note to Sarah as to her whereabouts and left it on the chaise longue from which she had so recently risen, then crept down the stairs and walked briskly back to the hospital.

She registered in and hurried up the stairs to Pediatrics. Mary Bryan smiled when she saw her. "I had a hunch you'd be back, Stuart," she told her. "You're no quitter. Did you enjoy your lift with the boy wonder?"

"I didn't expect to," Penny said simply. "He seems to have a pretty low opinion of me."

"Don't fool yourself, my dear. That lad's wise. I bet he tries to date you ——"

"Oh, no, Bryan," Penny exclaimed. Then, quickly, to change the subject, "Anything happen—Pudge just the same?"

Mary laughed. "How long do you think you've been away? An hour and a half. No, my dear, the mystery lad remains just the same. The Purdy woman didn't come at all this afternoon although I am sure I saw her standing in the doorway. Poor thing! I can't help feeling sorry for her no matter how this turns out. Can you?"

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"I know," Penny agreed, "and yet it almost looks deliberate on her part because if it is Pudge, the whole affair must have been in all the papers ——"

"But if he was reported drowned ——"

"She felt sure she was taking no chances, I suppose. But just the same ——"

"Well, it will all be settled one way or the other before very long now, and I, for one, shall be very glad. Let's get at the trays, Stuart. We're terribly cramped for room downstairs. I expected a couple of girls up here to help me but they didn't materialize. Arnold is in Men's Surgical so my relief will be late tonight. This new batch of guests has just about swamped us. Fortunately, some of them will be checking out in a day or two, I'm told. How long are you staying this time, Stuart?"

"Until we get the ward fixed for the night," Penny told her. "You look ready to drop, Bryan. Your face haunted me as I lay in my room with Sarah treating me as if I were a very special invalid. I felt like a heel."

"You're sweet, Penny Stuart," the nurse said. "And that Nick of yours is a darned lucky chap."

"That Nick of yours," Penny repeated to herself as she went about washing hands and faces, feeding the children, smoothing pillows and making the occupants of the ward comfortable. Again she saw Nick's face as he stood below her on the evening of that fateful day in October. Saw the strength and in-

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tegrity plainly visible in his clear gaze and manly bearing. Nick said he loved her. Lately she had begun to wonder if, perhaps, she loved him. Yet how could that be possible when it was Bart who held her heart in the hollow of his hand? Bart who had turned from her to Louise. She winced as if in pain at the thought and was surprised that it wasn't her heart that hurt so much as her vanity. "Shame on you, Penny Stuart!" she told herself disgustedly. "Of course Bart thinks of you as a younger sister. If you hadn't been so blind you would have seen it all the time. Be yourself!"

She was strangely happy as she left the hospital later in the evening and went down the hill to the bus stop. She didn't want to be late for dinner. There was no need of stirring things up more than was necessary. She hoped Sarah had kept her own counsel but wasn't at all confident. Sarah meant well but Penny wished she would realize that the child she had once nursed was now a grown woman and quite capable of taking care of herself. Yet she couldn't hurt the woman's feelings—it wasn't worth that.

She left the bus at the corner of Chestnut Place and walked almost blithely past the well-kept homes of her neighbors. She breathed deeply of the mingled perfume of lilac and syringa and feasted her eyes on great beds of peonies, long borders of iris and the flowering hedges of snowy spirea separating adjoining properties. She loved this street—loved every

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home on it. And she didn't mind in the least that because of her work at the hospital she would have to remain in town all summer. Let Mother and Uncle Stephen go away if they liked. Sarah and Maggie and she would stay right in Wellsport and revel in its summer beauty.

MAUDE PENDERGAST DROVE MRS. MANNING AND her sister to Good Samaritan Hospital and asked to be shown to the Children's Ward where Penny Stuart was on duty as Nurse's Aide. Mr. Lowell had notified Penny of their probable advent and Penny and Mary Bryan were nervously awaiting their arrival.

"I wish I had asked Morris to stick around for a while this morning. I'm scared, Stuart, and I'm not fooling. I only hope Mrs. Manning won't pass out or scream or make a scene. Do you suppose she will?"

"So am I scared," Penny said; "but it had to be done. He is so much better this morning that he is apt to open his eyes any minute now. No, I don't think Mrs. Manning will make a scene, Bryan. She never struck me as that sort although I didn't know her at all well."

"Do you know, Stuart," the nurse murmured nervously, "I'm afraid we've started something we aren't sure we can finish. Suppose I get the resident up here? He's almost human at times. Let's tell him just enough to interest him. After all, this is a hospital not a police station. If this youngster turns out to be the Manning boy there's apt to be fireworks. I'm going to call Morris. He's a good scout ——"

Doctor Morris arrived in a few minutes and Mary

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Bryan explained something of the mystery as it appeared to her and Penny Stuart. Penny had had little contact with any of the doctors and felt sure most of the staff were quite unaware of her existence. Now the tall, grave man stared at her over his spectacles and shook his head.

" You know you shouldn't have done this, Bryan," he said in disapproval. " A hospital is no place for scenes and there is sure to be one. Think what it might do to the other children. It isn't at all likely a thing such as you speak of could happen—especially to well known people like the Mannings. I'd say, offhand, you girls had been reading too many mystery stories or going to too many movies. When is this party of investigators arriving and where is the mother all this time? "

" If you mean Mrs. Purdy, Doctor Morris," Mary Bryan explained, " she had a most disturbing effect on the boy and I urged her to stay away until we felt he was improved enough so that her extreme nervousness wouldn't harm him. She hung over his bed all the time she was with him—never removing her eyes from his face. It bothered him and so I suggested that she stay away. He really has improved during the last day or two. Haven't you noticed? "

" Of course he has improved," the doctor smiled. " He should have after the good care he's been receiving. He's a husky youngster and while the shock lasted longer than usual, I anticipate no ill effects

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from it if he is kept quiet for a few days. That we must insist upon. But I don't know about this Mrs. Manning—how she will react to the resemblance which you insist is so remarkable."

Mary looked inquiringly at Penny who said quietly: "Mrs. Pendergast is bringing Mrs. Manning at ten-thirty this morning, Doctor Morris. I'm sure she will make no scene. She isn't that sort of woman. But I do wish you could stay—be on hand when she sees him for the first time. Oh, it will mean so much to her if it really is Pudge!"

"Why, of course it will—why not?" the doctor said. "Was she actually reconciled—was she satisfied in her own mind that her son was drowned? You say the body was never recovered."

"Just his sweater and one of his shoes," Penny explained. "No, I think she never has been convinced he was drowned although the authorities seemed satisfied. But then, Pudge wasn't their child. It makes a difference, doesn't it?"

"Indeed it does." Doctor Morris gazed at Penny's earnest, pleading face and forgot that he was entirely out of sympathy with the whole project. He looked at his watch. "They should be here," he murmured just as the elevator stopped and Penny went to meet Mrs. Pendergast and the two women who were with her. Mrs. Manning's eyes filled with tears as she took Penny's extended hand in hers.

"Mrs. Pendergast tells me you love working here,

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"my dear," she said after a moment. "I can well imagine it. You love children and have such wonderful understanding of their small interests. This seems to be quite a large hospital after all. I was led to believe it was small."

"This is Doctor Morris, Mrs. Manning," Penny explained. "Would you like to have him show you about? The children love company and are so brave and darling. There is one little boy behind the screen I'm sure you will be interested in—he's still unconscious but is improving rapidly."

"A little boy?" Mrs. Manning asked tremulously.

"Wait until you see him, Mrs. Manning," Penny urged and motioned the doctor to lead the way.

Doctor Morris eyed Penny for a moment and his lips quirked in a smile. Here she was ordering him around as if she were Chief of Staff instead of merely a Nurse's Aide. But he moved along the ward, greeting the children as he passed and at last reached the screened bed at the end. Mrs. Manning drew back. The others were still halfway down the room although they were keenly aware of something out of the ordinary about to take place. A hush lay on the ward.

"It's all right," the resident said still somewhat doubtful. "Just a severe concussion and a broken arm. This little chap will run away —"

There was a sharp intake of breath then a whispered: "Pudge—Pudgey—darling! Oh, then you

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aren't dead—oh, my darling little son—speak to Mother."

The doctor drew back as the woman sank to her knees and drew the boy into her arms. He murmured sleepily and opened his eyes. Recognition and bewilderment struggled for supremacy.

"Hello, Mummy!" he said. "Where you been? I looked an' I looked an' you weren't there. My arm hurts. What you cryin' for, Mummy?"

"Because I'm so happy, darling," she murmured against his cheek.

"Where you been?" he demanded again, a puzzled frown on his face. "I couldn't find you an' I looked an' looked an'—an'—" The frown grew deeper and he stared about him as if trying to recall the past, then he went on—"I guess I was lost." He rubbed his face against his mother's arm. "I guess I was dreamin'. It was a funny dream, Mummy. A lady an' a man found me when I was lost an' said I was their little boy; but I knew they were just foolin' 'cause I wasn't, was I?"

"Of course not. You are our little boy and Daddy will be home soon for a whole month and he will be so happy to see you—us all again. My, but you've grown since Daddy saw you last. I'm glad the kind lady in your dream found you, darling."

He frowned again and the doctor moved nearer and suggested the boy had talked quite enough for the present; but Pudge still had something he wanted

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to say. "She said my name was Richard Purdy an' I let her think it was only I knew it wasn't. I'm Bruce Holbrook Manning, but my daddy always calls me Pudge. Where's Sheila, Mummy? I want to go home. Can I go home right now?"

"Not just now, my lad," Doctor Morris said.
"But soon, if you are a good boy."

"I'm a good boy, aren't I, Mummy?"

"You're a good boy except when you run away—then you're naughty," she explained gravely.

"Perhaps we can find a private room for him, Mrs. Manning," the doctor said. "He should be kept quiet for a few days and I'm afraid he's the type who would demand action if he remained in Pediatrics. No doubt we can arrange for you to stay with him if you like. We are terribly short of nurses but with you to care for him he won't need the services of a special. How about it?"

There was a flurry at the door and Mrs. Purdy, white-faced and hysterical, fought the two girls who were trying to prevent her entrance. She screamed and Doctor Morris said in a quick aside to Mrs. Manning:

"That is Mrs. Purdy who claims to be the boy's mother. Will you talk to her or is this a case for the police?"

"I will talk to her, Doctor," Mrs. Manning said quietly. "Is there some place where we can be alone?" She caught Penny in her arms as the girl

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came forward. " You're sweet," she whispered. " I'll see you again. Take care of him until I return."

Penny nodded and Mrs. Manning went into the corridor where Mrs. Purdy was weeping and moaning while Mary Bryan and the corridor student nurse plied her with smelling salts and advice. In the midst of the excitement her husband arrived.

" Is he dead? " he asked, his eyes frightened.

" Are you Mr. Purdy? " Mrs. Manning asked. At his nod she went on: " My son told me of dreaming he was lost and being found by you and your wife. He said you were very kind to him—that you treated him as if he were really your own. He has no idea this all actually happened. He remembers it only as a dream. Later, perhaps, he will realize the truth. I want to thank you for taking such good care of him."

" Then you are Mrs. Manning? I told Min we'd ought to try to locate you; but you see, our son died long ago an' she—Min—ain't been just herself since then an' she wanted to keep him. I'm sorry. We love that youngster an' he was gettin' to love us like his own parents. What you goin' to do with us? We didn't mean no harm. The boy was lost an'—well—Min said finders is keepers an' he was so little an' so cold an' lost—" He cleared his throat. " He sort o' took to us, too."

" I know, Mr. Purdy. Pudge was always a friendly little boy," his mother explained. " Oh, I'm so happy

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to have him back that I don't want to punish anyone. And thank you—thank you for being kind to him. Now I must go back to him. Be gentle with your wife, Mr. Purdy. I'm sorry for her—that she has to lose Pudge."

Mary Bryan, accustomed to all sorts of scenes, felt the sting of tears behind her eyes as she saw Mrs. Manning extend her hand to the man before she went back to her resurrected son. Mrs. Purdy was quieter now and her husband led her away. The nurse and her aide watched them go and Doctor Morris smiled as he prepared to leave the ward.

"Don't look so woebegone, girls," he admonished them cheerily. "The way of the transgressor is never a particularly happy one when his conscience or justice catches up with him. But don't start playing detective again. It's risky business—especially for rank amateurs like you."

"How do you mean 'rank,' Doctor?" Mary Bryan demanded pertly.

"And remember we solved the mystery, Doctor Morris," Penny reminded him. "Don't forget that."

"No danger," the man grinned. "I'll probably be dragged before the Board for countenancing any such demonstration inside these sacred walls—especially in Pediatrics."

"I doubt if one of the children understood what was going on," the nurse said. "They were so interested in watching the two lovely visitors who came

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with Mrs. Manning that they had neither eyes nor ears for anything else. They were both swell, Stuart. Look at them now. Why, they control the entire ward!"

Mrs. Pendergast was telling them about her two police dogs that she loaned the government for war work. The children sat or lay entranced and Doctor Morris nodded approvingly and went on down the corridor. His parting words, however, were: "Beginners' luck this time; only don't try it again. I can't stand it."

The hospital was full to overflowing and there was no private room to be had and no special nurse either. So it was arranged that Mrs. Manning was to be her son's companion during the day and her sister, Mrs. Knowlton, his nurse at night. Under the circumstances the Superintendent and Chief of Staff were quite willing to make concessions, especially as it obviated the necessity for a special nurse or nurses. After all, the arrangement would continue for barely a week.

The story spread throughout the hospital in spite of Doctor Morris's efforts to prevent it. Penny's stock went up and she felt a bit embarrassed at the attention shown her. Mrs. Manning refused to prefer charges against the two people who had taken her boy—insisting it could not have been kidnapping inasmuch as the child was apparently lost and they found him. She sympathized with the mother in her

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longing for a child to take the place of her dead son and in spite of those who insisted the action of the two was criminal, continued to take a friendly interest in them.

Stephen Lowell was jubilant over the outcome and Penny's mother acknowledged the affair turned out better than she had anticipated; but she insisted Penny had no right getting herself mixed up in domestic controversies and urged her to keep strictly to the duties of Nurse's Aide and leave the solving of mysteries to others. Of course, the story reached the papers and reporters swarmed about the Stuart home and Good Samaritan Hospital; but after all, it was wartime, interest waned and the incident was forgotten, a fact for which Penny was grateful. She felt she had done nothing worth mentioning—merely recognized a child supposed to have been drowned. Anyone could have done as much.

"I shudder to think of what might have happened if I had not become a Nurse's Aide, Mother," she said one day after the affair had gone from the front page of the *Courier*. "No one else knew him or his family. They live in Chicago and Chicago and Wellsport are a thousand miles apart. Or suppose I had not gone to Grandfather's the year the Mannings rented the cottage up the beach. Why, I should never have met Pudge and he would have grown up never knowing his real parents! Isn't it queer how things work out?"

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"I know," her mother agreed. "And just now I'm wondering why Louise bothered to become engaged to Bart Ames if, all the time, as she says, she loved Alan Lowell and intended marrying him. It doesn't make sense to me."

"Did she tell you this, Mother?" Penny asked, her heart missing a beat.

"Of course. It was while we were south in the spring. We had lunch together one afternoon—that is, Louise and I had lunch. Stephen was far too upset to join us and Alan had an appointment with someone. I suppose I showed my surprise at her marriage with Alan, especially after the scene she made on the day we received word of Bart's disappearance. I was frank with her and asked her how she could do such a thing. She made light of the whole affair. Told me she never had any intention of marrying Bart—that he had served her purpose—brought Alan to heel—yes, my dear, those were her exact words. I suppose I looked shocked for, after all, Bart and Alan are both fine young men."

"It sounds just like her," Penny murmured. In looking back over the past months the girl felt that after all she owed a great deal to her cousin. If Louise had not played that despicable trick there was little doubt but she, Penny Stuart, would still be contented to remain only half alive—still secretly amused, even a little flattered, at the reputation she bore among her associates—that of being sweet and lovely

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but absolutely useless. Why, what a terrible arraignment! How could she ever have allowed such a thing? She shuddered. And yet, remembering the suffering she had endured those first weeks and months, Penny knew that while she might be grateful—even forgive Louise—she could never thank her for the awakening. It had been altogether too painful.

Then, too, there were her changed feelings toward Bart. All her life she had worshiped the tall, attractive young man who though like a son to her adored father was never regarded as a brother by her father's daughter. Her love for Bart had awakened early and, fed by his devotion, had grown until it filled her entire life. When the blight had struck she struggled against disillusion and despair until new interests and hard work had tempered the poignancy of her grief so that she could now recall it all without bitterness as something that had to be endured during the process of acquiring a well-rounded maturity. She knew she did not love Bart Ames as some day she would love the man she would marry. Barton Ames was no longer her ideal—imperishable and flawless. She was amazed and a little breathless to find it so and suddenly she felt light and free. Her mother gazed at her curiously, and at last Penny sensed her intent regard.

"Go on, Mother," she said, still a little breathless at her sudden discovery. "What else happened?"

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"You appeared to be miles away, Penny," her mother reproved.

"I was thinking of Louise and the zigzag course she takes to accomplish her ends," Penny explained.

"I know. Louise is fully aware Stephen doesn't approve of her and never wanted her to marry Alan and she knew Alan adored his father and would hesitate to hurt him. So, as she put it quite bluntly, she got the unwary Alan right where she wanted him and then with his father safely out of the way, married him. It all sounds dreadfully hard and sordid; but I truly believe Louise loves Alan—loves him devotedly and if she doesn't try to dominate him completely, will make him a good wife. Oh, I hope so, Penny. Stephen worries about him."

"Uncle Stephen's an old granny, Mother," Penny said affectionately. "Alan's his one lamb and I doubt if he would think any girl quite good enough for him. Let's see, Mother. How old is Alan? Twenty-seven or eight, isn't he? Either should make him quite old enough to make up his own mind. Don't let Uncle Stephen bother you, darling. Alan can take care of himself."

"I suppose so," her mother murmured absently.

"Just why isn't Alan in uniform, Mother?" Penny asked curiously. "Do you know? I've often wondered but didn't like to ask. Louise is so terribly patriotic it's a wonder she hasn't engineered him into it. He's physically fit, isn't he? It isn't that, is it?"

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"I thought you knew," her mother explained in surprise. "He has been deferred—indefinitely, I think. You see it's his work—consultant. With some branch of Federal Housing. Louise told me they would probably remain in Washington for the duration. It pleases her."

"It would," Penny murmured.

"I wish the rift between Stephen and them could be bridged, Penny. It makes it rather awkward and you know Louise, my dear. She seems to delight in antagonizing Stephen at every opportunity."

"Let us hope their stay in Washington will be permanent, Mother," Penny smiled. "It's heavenly being permitted to live normally without having Louise continually dropping in with advice and criticism. Sarah is showing the effect already. Don't you notice it?"

Mrs. Lowell nodded. "Is that what has done it? Then I, too, hope they remain in the Capital. Perhaps I'm selfish, Penny, but I want Stephen to be completely happy."

"He is happy, darling," Penny assured her. "He's sweet, Mother. I adore Uncle Stephen. It's wonderful having him around—we all feel so, even the redoubtable Sarah who doesn't have a great deal of use for men."

"I'm glad, Penny." Her mother smiled rather tremulously. "It makes me very happy to know that you approve of Stephen."

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There was quiet in Penny's room for a long moment. Summer rain beat against the windows and drenched the garden below. Scents from a thousand rain-washed flowers crept into the room. From the direction of the kitchen came faint sounds of music. Maggie had her radio on while she was preparing dinner. Penny lay relaxed and happy on her gay, chintz-covered chaise longue. Through half-closed eyes she watched her mother at the dressing table, absently polishing her nails. She appeared younger. The faint lines of sadness about her mouth and eyes had vanished. Penny thought with a rush of tenderness that at last her mother looked completely happy. There was a knock on the half-open door and at Penny's "Come in," Sarah entered. Her face was disapproving and she said grudgingly:

"Telephone, Miss Penny. It's that hospital. I told 'em you was resting but they had to talk to you just the same. I hope you ain't thinking of going back there tonight, Miss Penny. You hadn't ought to let her, Mrs. Lowell. She ain't looking any too chipper —"

Penny picked up the extension and waving a restraining hand at Sarah spoke into the transmitter. The two in the room heard her say eagerly:

"But of course I will come. All right, Miss Donaldson. Right after dinner—eight-thirty. I can stay just as long as you need me—all night if you like. No, I'm not at all tired. Very well—eight-thirty."

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"Well, I must say!" exploded Sarah and subsided, muttering dire warnings when Penny protested.

"But darling!" her mother demurred. "This can't be necessary. Do you think you should? After all, you have given four hours today."

"Four 'hours'!" Penny dismissed them as negligible. "Two more of the nurses have left for army bases, Mother," she explained, laying out a clean uniform. "And there seems to be an epidemic of weddings among the students and aides just now. Of course, they have a right to a few days honeymoon before they separate probably for the duration. Then, too, we are still overcrowded because of that munition factory explosion. Don't worry about me, darling. This rush won't last long and after all I'm doing so much less than the trained nurses—much—much less, because they have the responsibility. I merely do the superficial things."

"Superficial!" her mother sniffed disapprovingly. "You mean the unpleasant things. I wish you had never gone into it, Penny. Honestly I do. When Louise begins to rave about some of the things you have to do, my blood chills. It isn't right —"

"There you go, Mother," Penny warned her. "Letting Louise dictate to you—color your thoughts and ideas. Honestly, darling, I'm glad she's left town. We'll all be much happier without her. Look at me—look carefully. Don't you think I've improved since I became an aide?"

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Her mother's loving gaze swept over her daughter and she held out her hands to draw her into her arms. "There was no need for improvement, my darling," she told her, pressing her lips against the girl's soft cheek. "You were always perfect to your mother."

Penny gave her a little shake. "You're prejudiced, Mother," she scolded. "I can assure you I was far from perfect to everyone else—Louise included. I was selfish, lazy, good-for-nothing and if you weren't blind you would have seen it long ago. Listen, Mother. I have taken far more out of this job than I have ever put into it and I shall never cease to be grateful." She drew away and swept a comb through her thick, shining hair. "I wonder if we can't have dinner a little early tonight. When do you expect Uncle Stephen, Mother?"

"I think he came in a few minutes ago," her mother said. "I'll go down and see if I can hurry Maggie."

Penny stood in front of her mirror and smiled at the girl reflected there. She drew herself to her full height and swung her arms high above her head in happy abandon. It was good to be needed and to feel competent to fill that need.

IT WAS PENNY'S SECOND MORNING IN MALE SURGICAL and during the night the corner bed had received a new occupant. Armed with a tray on which reposed all the paraphernalia needed for morning ablutions, she approached the bed. Barstow, the nurse in charge, joined her with the information that she would take over in this particular case. Penny gave way with relief. The man was young, in his early twenties, and had a cynical twist to his thin, almost colorless lips. He had been in an accident in which he suffered several broken ribs, a mild concussion and rather severe lacerations on head and arms and was quite thoroughly bandaged giving him something the appearance of a particularly unprepossessing mummy. He was morose and difficult and stared at Barstow belligerently, refusing to cooperate in any way. When he refused to open his mouth to allow for the swabbing of teeth and gums, she spoke sharply and he snarled in a way that brought a rebuke from his nearest neighbor and a growl to "pipe down" from a man two beds across. Barstow never turned a hair. Penny marveled at her composure. She thought, that's what training does for one.

"That will get you nothing, my friend," the nurse told him firmly. "We are all for oral hygiene in this

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hospital. Here, open your mouth and no more nonsense."

Penny stood nearby watching and old man Winters in a bed across the room was alert, with every indication of coming to the nurse's aid in case of further mutiny in spite of the fact that his long abdominal incision was far from healed. Mr. Winters had been in the ward a long time and fathered them all—nurses, students, aides and patients alike. They all adored him. However, "Brother Nemo," as Barstow called him, because she knew he was there under an alias and no one knew anything about him except that his name was certainly not John Smith as he insisted it was, suffered his teeth and mouth to be swabbed with little more than angry grunts of protest. And his teeth were something to behold. Strong and white and amazingly even.

"You have a mouthful to be proud of, Mr. Smith," the nurse told him. "You should take care of those teeth." His only answer was a grunt and a scowl.

Barstow winked at Penny as she discarded the swab in the emesis basin on the tray.

"You won't have any trouble with him, Stuart," she said. "Just be firm." And Penny tried firmness but it was hard to keep from showing temper. She decided right then and there that she didn't like Male Surgical at all and then when she came to a kindly middle-aged man who helped her all he could, talk-

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ing encouragingly—grateful for everything she did for his comfort—she changed her mind.

Barstow fed the mystery man his first breakfast such as it was as his fever was still high, and Penny was grateful for her help. She had had one experience with a fever patient biting a feeding tube and though he was a child and could be easily handled, she didn't want a recurrence. She wished she was trained to take care of cases such as this and decided that after all Barstow wouldn't ask her to do anything of which she wasn't capable. The thought comforted her—gave her courage.

When Penny reached the ward the next morning she found "Brother Nemo" under an oxygen tent.

"He would have to get pneumonia," Barstow complained in exasperation. "Honestly, I think the creature did it on purpose just to annoy me. Now we have got a job on our hands. He's a pretty sick man."

Penny stood beside the nurse and listened to his harsh breathing. He muttered and growled unintelligibly and to Penny there seemed to be a thread of menace running through the delirium. She sensed it but could not analyze it satisfactorily. She shuddered from time to time as she listened, striving to understand what he said. It was much easier to care for him now and he seldom rebelled. Then, on the third day, she heard him repeat in a mixture of English and German what appeared to be a lesson.

"Buford—*negrte mahl* (next time)—*sändt* (sand)

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—bolts—nitro-timing—*halb zwölf* (eleven-thirty)—*rothkopft wachtsmann* (red headed watchman)." Then in louder and decidedly angry tones: "*Geben sie es ihm hinter die ohren* (give it to him behind the ears)." He was silent for a moment then "*Der Keller—nein—nein*—(The cellar—no—no) loose catch ——" Then over and over—the same words—until they became a jumble and he would groan and lapse into silence, only his heavy breathing heard, until rousing as if summoned to duty he would repeat the same words beginning with a sharp clearness and after the third or fourth repetition becoming inarticulate once more. Intrigued, Penny wrote down the words in her notebook. What did they mean? As if in answer to her mental query, the mysterious Mr. Smith laughed raucously, gasping for breath between the words he whispered: "Get them—Arms—*nein—nein*—failures—failures—failures — *Ich sage ihnen es war unforhaft getahn.*" (I tell you it was an accident.) He said the last over and over adding "*nein—nein*—failure." Then he whispered something that might have been a "*Heil Hitler*" and in Penny's excited state sounded exactly like it, especially as the patient's bandaged arm attempted a Nazi salute.

Penny closed the notebook and sought Barstow. She told her what she surmised and showed the notes she had taken. Barstow laughed and said she was sure "*Brother Nemo*" was okay. No doubt he had

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been to a movie just before the accident or been reading some blood and thunder yarn.

"Listen, Stuart," she chided, "I think you're hipped on mysteries. The poor lug in there's as harmless as a dove. All his bluster is purely defensive. In delirium one is apt to talk the most utterly fantastic trash. Don't let it get you. He's all right—except he's a mighty sick man."

But Penny wasn't satisfied. She had heard Uncle Stephen mention the rumor going around that the explosion at the Wellsport Arms Plant had been definitely proved to be a case of sabotage. The Buford Engine Works was just outside the city—a huge plant employing several thousand people. Perhaps this mystery man was one of a gang of saboteurs—enemy aliens. She was more than ever convinced when she heard next day that two strange men had tried to force their way into the ward and refused to tell whom they were visiting. The two student nurses working with Barstow were scared out of their wits and Barstow had to summon help before she could get rid of them.

"I tell you that John Smith is no innocent, Barstow," Penny insisted when Barstow related her experience. "I wish you would tell Doctor Hammond or Doctor Morris about this." She held out her notebook. "I'm sure he will bear investigating."

But Barstow scoffed again. "You and your mysteries! What do you imagine the poor guy is, Stuart?"

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A Nazi spy? Want me to get laughed at for my pains? Those two plug-uglies didn't ask to see him. They were looking for someone ——”

“ How do you know it wasn't your 'Brother Nemo' ? ” Penny demanded. “ You said yourself you felt sure he was here under an alias—that his name wasn't John Smith. People don't use aliases unless they have something to hide. If you want me to, I'll tell Doctor Hammond about it.”

The elevator stopped down the corridor and the house physician came toward them as they stood just outside the door of the ward. He smiled at Penny then greeted Barstow with :

“ What's this I hear about your receiving your gentleman friends while on duty? Don't you know that's against the rules, Barstow? ” His eyes behind his spectacles were twinkling while his face and voice were grave.

Barstow bridled. “ I assure you they were no friends of mine, Doctor Morris, and believe me, their stay was short.”

“ Now there's a mystery for our Miss Sherlock Holmes here,” he teased, turning to Penny. “ Can you explain their possible presence here? I suppose you've already heard the talk that we're harboring a spy or spies in our fair city though I don't imagine they would be interested in Good Samaritan while there are any number of military objectives to attract their unholy attention.” He smiled and Penny stiff-

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ened. She didn't enjoy being laughed at. Then she plunged.

"I'm wondering if they might have been looking for a pal of theirs, the mysterious John Smith—there under the oxygen tent," Penny explained coolly while her heart raced. "There's something sinister about him ——"

"Didn't I warn you to let mysteries alone?" he reminded her. "Just because you happened to be lucky once doesn't guarantee that you've run another one to earth, my girl. But what's on your mind? Might as well hear what it is."

Penny smiled. "You're as bad as Uncle Stephen, Doctor Morris," she said, opening her notebook to the page containing the scraps of sentences she had recorded. "What do you make of them, Doctor? I translated them as well as I could and I think it's accurate. I'll confess it sounds sinister to me. It sounded even worse when he said it."

"Of course you realize it is unethical to use information gathered in this way, don't you?" he chided. "Information—confessions made to a doctor or a nurse should be held inviolate—in strictest confidence ——"

"But we are at war," Penny reminded him.

"And all things are fair in love and war, I suppose you were about to say and I agree that circumstances alter cases, to repeat another bromide. Now let's see your evidence."

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to go the whole way for she met the man she sought on his way up. She followed him and went into the ward to stand close to the nurse in charge who was having difficulty in persuading the strangers to retire. But they stood firm, their eyes scanning the room in search of someone. Suddenly the gaze of one of the newcomers reached the man in the corner bed and he touched his companion's arm.

"Jake," he muttered and lifted his hand in greeting but if "Brother Nemo" saw, he gave no sign.

Every eye in the room with the possible exception of the mysterious Mr. Smith was fixed on the two strangers, the nurse and her aide.

"Having trouble, Nurse?" a voice asked smoothly from the doorway and the two officers came into the room. There was a strangled cry from the corner bed and Barstow and Penny ran to him. The man had fainted. When he had been revived and the girls had time to look around, the strangers were gone. Penny breathed a sigh of relief. She carried the florist's box to the service room and tossed it down the rubbish chute. Who knew what those innocent looking flowers contained? In his corner of the corridor sat the plain clothes man as imperturbable as if nothing had happened. Penny paused beside him for a moment.

"What became of them?" she asked. "They went very quietly."

"Nothing else for them to do," the man said

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simply. "What did you do with the box they brought?"

"The flowers? Threw them and the box down the trash chute," Penny told him. "Why?"

The man sprang to his feet. "We might need them," he muttered. He raced down the stairs and Penny went back to the ward.

The mystery man remained silent; but his eyes were ever watchful and a little afraid. Once he demanded his clothes and when Penny assured him they would be forthcoming when he should be well enough to wear them, he glared malevolently at her but said nothing more. However, he submitted to her administrations and even ate what she gave him without comment or complaint. But when she came on duty one morning she found his bed empty. Barstow told her that sometime after midnight he had disappeared. A robe and slippers belonging to a man in the ward who was convalescent had vanished with him. The wire screening was neatly cut from its frame and the heavy vines that completely covered the rambling old building were torn and ripped loose in many spots as he had made his downward way. Neither Collins, the nurse in charge, nor the students assisting her had seen or heard any betraying sound. The officer on guard was mad as a hornet at nurse and students alike and at every patient in the ward; but maddest, perhaps, at himself for not being more alert to the danger.

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Doctor Morris was worried for fear the staff might be in danger. The man must have realized he had talked in his delirium and would therefore blame the nurses for his predicament. Barstow, Collins and the student nurses lived in the Nurses' Home on the hospital grounds so were probably safest. But the aides, especially Penny Stuart, lived at some distance and were more or less in constant danger. It was a distinct relief to him as well as to the entire hospital staff when a week later, ill and weak from hunger, Jacob Stoss, alias "Brother Nemo," alias John Smith, alias The Mystery Man, was apprehended in a barn two miles outside Wellsport. The F.B.I. quickly rounded up the rest of the gang and once again Penny Stuart was in the limelight. This time, however, the notoriety was confined to the hospital which was bad enough in the girl's estimation. She didn't like it at all.

Penny had been careful not to mention the affair at home and it was Doctor Hammond who related the story to Uncle Stephen Lowell. He, in turn, most unwisely repeated it to his wife who was very distressed and couldn't understand her husband's pride in her daughter.

"Our Penny uses her head for something besides wearing a fetching cap, my dear," he told Penny's mother. "I'm proud of her and so is Hammond."

"But the notoriety, Stephen!" mourned his wife. "It isn't good for her—it will ruin her socially——"

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"Nonsense, Adelaide," her husband scoffed. "There won't be any notoriety—that is outside the hospital—and they have nothing but admiration for her alertness and patriotism. I imagine you and I are the only ones outside the hospital and those directly concerned who know anything about Penny's part in the affair. And after all, my dear, she probably averted a terrible disaster."

"But when those horrible men get out of prison they might harm her, Stephen. They are vindictive and ——"

Stephen Lowell laughed. "When those men get out of prison, my dear, the war will be over and they will be shipped right back to Germany where they belong, that is, if they aren't sent up for life or worse. After all, three people lost their lives in that explosion at the Arms Plant. In their own country their lives wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel for a crime far less serious than the one they committed against us. Let us hope the Court gives them, at least, life imprisonment. Now don't worry about it any more, darling."

"Just the same," his wife persisted, "I wish Penny wouldn't get herself mixed up in these things. Other girls don't and she never used to. It's that hospital. She meets such strange people."

Her husband laughed again. "This war is changing our sense of values, my dear," he pointed out, "and a good thing, too. Snobbery has no place in a

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democratic world. Penny has grown wonderfully, both mentally and spiritually, during her months of hospital work. I used to think of her as a charming, lovely child—never quite a woman in spite of her twenty years. But now she is really beautiful—a splendid young woman." He sighed. "I wish she and Alan could have fallen in love. Penny is going to make a marvelous wife for some lucky man."

"For Bart—I hope, Stephen," Penny's mother said softly. "It has been the dream of my life. I can't begin to tell you how disappointed I was when he became engaged to Louise. It didn't seem right—it never has and I was glad when it was broken—in spite of everything," she continued firmly.

"You don't have to remind me that Louise used Bart for her own purposes, Adelaide," her husband said shortly. "And I doubt if Penny will be satisfied to take Louise's leavings or castoffs, my dear. Penny and Louise have never been especially fond of each other. In fact, I feel sure Louise has always been insanely jealous of Penny and has left no stone unturned to hurt her in every possible way. Don't set your heart on Penny's marrying Bart Ames, Adelaide, when and if he comes home, because I feel sure she will do nothing of the sort."

"I don't see how you can be so positive about it," Mrs. Lowell said plaintively. She was annoyed. How was it possible for Stephen Lowell to know so much about Penny? Penny was her daughter, wasn't she?

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"I have felt for some time that Penny was terribly unhappy about Bart's engagement, Stephen. She isn't one to show her emotions, but both Sarah and I feel that she loves Bart very dearly."

"Undoubtedly—as a big brother—nothing more. You and Sarah are too close to her. You see what you want to see—both being more than a little fond of Bart yourselves. Now let us settle whether we go to your father's for a week or two or if we shall stay right here in Wellsport and enjoy our garden. Whichever you decide will be perfectly satisfactory to me." He spoke placatingly, knowing his wife was vexed.

"You want to stay here, don't you?" Penny's mother replied and because she was annoyed she continued, perversely: "But I feel I should go to Maine, for a few days, at least. Father looks forward to my visits. Please don't feel compelled to accompany me, Stephen. I can very well go alone, if you prefer to remain here."

Stephen Lowell dropped a kiss on his wife's shining hair, and patted her shoulder affectionately. "So we go to Maine. All right. Perhaps Penny can be persuaded to come along for a few days. Or don't you think so?"

"No," Mrs. Lowell replied somewhat resentfully, "I doubt if anything could tear her away unless it might be Mrs. Dean's baby. Penny seems to have taken over the full responsibility of that poor child.

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And Mrs. Seeley appears to have followed her example. I imagine when the baby does put in an appearance Penny will want to rush right up there. Father wrote me Louella insists upon Penny being the child's godmother. It would be just like Father to offer himself as godfather. She seems like a sweet girl. Father has taken quite a fancy to her. Poor child! But I don't like the idea of Penny remaining here in town all summer and working long hours at that hospital. I tell you, Stephen, it worries me."

"Oh, well, when the war is over and the boys return home, she will no doubt marry one of them and settle down to be happy ever after. I assure you, my dear wife, you need have no least concern about our Penny. You ought to hear Hammond rave about her. Why, in Good Samaritan they are all devoted to the girl—nurses, doctors and internes even, and Heaven knows they're the least susceptible creatures in the world. Cheer up, Adelaide. Penny can take care of herself."

AS IF TO REFUTE THAT STATEMENT OF STEPHEN Lowell regarding the immunity of internes to the charms of the female members of a hospital staff, Ross Andrews headed his shabby car for the curb and parked sharply. Penny Stuart came down the hill from Good Samaritan and didn't even glance in his direction as he opened the door and called:

"Hi, Stuart! Want a lift? Or even if you don't, come on anyway."

Penny shook her head and walked on. Nothing daunted, the young man started the car and drove slowly beside her, keeping close to the curb.

"It's hot today and you might suffer a stroke or something," he warned, "and then what would G.S. do without its bright and shining example of what a glamour gal can become when driven to it? Aw, come on, Stuart. Don't be mad at me. I assure you I'm quite harmless—even a bit attractive when one gets to know me."

Penny stopped in exasperation. She supposed this would go on for the entire distance to her home unless she boarded a bus and as usual there was no bus in sight. The young man, mistaking her pause for acceptance of his invitation, leaped out and opened the door with a flourish.

"Allow me," he murmured, bowing from the hips

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and doffing an imaginary plumed hat. "The pleasure is all mine."

"I'm sure it is," Penny retorted, then was sorry because, after all, she supposed he meant to be kind, or did he? One could never be sure about this clever young man.

"Still sore, aren't you? Now listen, me proud beauty," he said, driving slowly in spite of the scarcity of traffic in this part of town; "how was I to know you were the pride of the aides? I had never had any truck with the creatures before and when Hammond told me he would have Williams send an aide to help me, I was quite naturally sore. I thought I rated better than that."

"You did?" Penny asked sweetly. "And just why?"

"Say, listen, will you? And cut the sarcasm. My preacher dad contends sarcasm's a device of the Devil. I don't indulge in it—much." He grinned at her and Penny found herself smiling in return.

"Why don't you do that oftener, my gal?" he asked. "Your face is lovely when you smile. Otherwise it's too sober—too mature for your years. Do you smile at the patients when you scrub their ears, Stuart? If you do, I don't wonder they submit without a whimper. Personally, though, I think you should be barred from the male wards. Too hard on the arteries."

"Not much, you don't resort to sarcasm, Doctor

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Andrews," Penny jeered. "What do you call the choice remarks you have been handing out to me this very minute? Now suppose you listen to me for a change. I'm not in the least susceptible to flattery. I don't like it. If I'm a good aide it's because I have been trained to be one and I like the work. That's all there is to it."

"I could disprove that statement—shoot it full of holes; but you'd only get mad again and I simply couldn't stand that. I suffer when you're mad at me, Penny." He cast a wary glance at her face as he brought out her name and Penny stiffened, then relaxed. The young man let his breath out in audible relief. "Let's be friends. Call me Andy."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," Penny demurred. "You know the hospital rules, and anyway, I thought your name was Ross."

He laughed delightedly. "How did you know that? Not many people here know it. Everyone calls me Andy. Who told you?"

Penny bit her lip. He was noticeably pleased that she knew his name. He probably thought she had been making inquiries—was interested. Well, she wasn't.

"I don't know, unless Mary Bryan mentioned it the day of the explosion at the Arms Plant. Yes, I'm sure she did. Why? Does it matter?"

"It doesn't matter at all, of course," he assured her. "It's simply that I'm flattered you should re-

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member it. Pretty country out this way, isn't it? I like this end of town. Don't you?"

"Why!" Penny exclaimed in dismay. "Where are we going? This isn't the way to Chestnut Place, Doctor Andrews. Please take me home. I'm late as it is and ——"

"Don't get excited, Penny," he soothed. "I merely thought a drive into the country and along the lake road might cool us off and give us a chance to get better acquainted. You don't really mind, do you?" he asked anxiously.

Penny was silent for a moment and the young man eased his pressure on the gas. The car slowed perceptibly.

"I'm being silly," the girl told herself. "What harm can there be in accepting this friendly invitation?" She turned to him and smiled again. "It is kind of you," she said pleasantly without a trace of coquetry, "and I don't mind at all. Only I have to be home rather soon, you know."

"Okay!" he cried jubilantly and drove along the suburban street until they reached the city limits where he swung sharply to the left and along a tree-shaded country road that led directly, though less frequently traveled, to the lake some five miles distant.

Penny glanced surreptitiously at her watch and saw it was barely six o'clock. If she reached home by seven she would be in ample time for dinner. There

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was no need of disrupting Maggie's schedule or in rousing the curiosity of Sarah Bates. Sarah worried a perfectly harmless and natural incident to shreds and Penny tried to give her nothing to fuss about. Then, too, she knew her mother was upset over her part in the Jacob Stoss incident and wanted to add no further fuel to the fire of her displeasure.

"Why so quiet, gal?" the young man asked, stealing a glance at her absorbed face. "Just soaking in some of this country coolness? Good!" he commended as Penny smiled assent.

"It's lovely out here, isn't it?" she murmured. "And do you know I haven't been out this way since last fall, nor to the lake either."

"That's fine. Then this will be something of a treat, won't it? Tell me, Penny," he went on, "why are you so stand-offish? So reserved and untouchable? You're young and lovely and—oh—well, just naturally delectable. Has some lucky guy already staked out a claim—got priorities? I want to know ——"

Penny gasped. She thought fast. Was it just a flirtation or was this young man feeling his way toward something really serious? A little twinge of fear shot through her heart. It must not happen.

"If you mean am I engaged to anyone, no," she said honestly, and as his face lighted up she went on quickly. "But there is someone I love very dearly and when he gets back from the war—I hope to marry him." She said it simply although her heart

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beat fast. What if it wasn't true? She had to do something to stop this impetuous young man from getting hurt or hurting her. Bart need never know.

Doctor Andrews drove in silence for some time, then he turned to her and grinned. "Thanks for telling me," he said and patted the hands that lay folded in her lap. "He's a darned lucky chap, Penny. What's his job and where is he?"

And Penny surprised herself by saying proudly: "He's a pilot and he's somewhere in the South Pacific, or was the last I heard, which was last week. There is no formal engagement, Doctor Andrews, and you are the only person I have told, so I hope you won't mention it." Why, she was talking about Nick Marshall! Her cheeks burned and her heart did a complete somersault and then steadied. Suddenly she felt it was true. It was Nick she hoped to marry some day. Bart seemed very far away.

"I'm honored, Penny," the young man said soberly, "and of course I won't mention it. But even if you are—let's say, tacitly engaged, that is no reason why we can't be friends, is it? Surely the lug won't object to your going out with me occasionally, will he?"

"Probably not, only I'm a busy girl, you know." On the spur of the moment she made plans for filling every free moment of her day and evening. "What with helping out at the Canteen and doing what I can at Red Cross, there doesn't seem to be

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much time for other things even if I felt like it, which I don't—often. And besides, the Nurse's Aides aren't supposed to be friendly or have dates with male members of the staff, you know—you reminded me of that yourself—once. So please don't ask me—at least not very soon. It's much better that way. Oh, we're at the lake already! Isn't it lovely? I miss the sea ——" She stopped. She was always careful to refrain from mentioning her background in fear lest it might be misunderstood.

" You and me both," he said, " and believe me I'm getting back to it for a weekend some time next month—that is, if the Chief will let me off. I understand he's thinking of issuing an order ' No vacations this summer for any of the staff.' But I might manage it." His voice was nostalgic and Penny sympathized with him.

" Grandfather's place is in Maine and we usually go there for the summer. Not this summer, though. The beach is —"

" That's where you knew the Manning youngster, wasn't it? I heard all about that; but I didn't know you were the gal who solved that mystery until just lately. Say, you ought to join the F.B.I., Penny. I'd say you're a natural."

" It was largely luck," the girl replied. " Just as it was luck I happened to understand some German and was with Jake Stoss while he was delirious. Anyone in the same circumstances could have done as much.

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I refuse to take credit for any of it. It was all just luck."

"So you believe in luck, do you? Well, I do, too. It was luck that I happened to leave the hospital the same time you did this afternoon and I wish we had bathing suits and could take a swim right now." He had parked beside a giant boulder and they sat watching the lazy waves playing tag with the sandy beach. The soft lake breeze cooled their faces and they breathed deeply of its piney fragrance.

"It's too warm for swimming right now," Penny murmured, brushing a strand of hair from her eyes. "Don't you think it's cooler when we are in motion? Anyway, I have to go home. It has been wonderful and I appreciate your kindness in bringing me out here, Doctor Andrews ——"

"Couldn't you manage 'Andy,' Penny? It won't mean a thing except that you don't dislike me, perhaps. How about it?"

Penny laughed ruefully. "Why, of course, if you want me to; but I can't see that it matters. I certainly can't call you 'Andy' at the hospital and that's practically the only place I shall be seeing you."

"Not necessarily," he insisted. "You see, I too believe in luck and who knows but Lady Luck will smile on me again some time? It costs nothing to hope, you know, and believe me, Penny Stuart, I intend to keep on hoping with my fingers crossed—permanently. Okay, darling, back we go."

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Penny frowned. He saw the frown and grinned wickedly. But the girl said nothing and his grin lasted for several miles.

Penny thought a great deal about some of the girls and women working as aides in the hospital with her. It wasn't all give by any means. So many of them received help, physical and mental, even as she had. There was Mrs. Tower whose husband was killed at Pearl Harbor and she, herself, so badly injured that for a time she lost the use of her senses. She was blind, deaf and dumb and had no sense of smell. Her sight returned and her hearing. After a time she could speak as well and as clearly as ever; but her sense of smell was still dormant. Penny felt she should be grateful for that, because the hospital smells were the hardest things with which she had to contend. But Mrs. Tower was indeed a tower of strength. Small and slight she had the endurance of an Amazon and no job was too hard or too unpleasant for her to tackle. Penny felt she was a living example to the rest of them.

Then there was Miss Daley who taught school all day and came to the hospital at five every afternoon and worked until nine, besides giving her Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Penny liked Miss Daley who was in her forties and had a nephew overseas. This nephew was her only relative and she was educating him for the ministry. But in his first year at Theological Seminary, he had enlisted in the marines and

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was imprisoned somewhere in the Philippines. White-haired and aristocratic, she went her quiet way, saying little yet accomplishing much.

There were stenographers, saleswomen, teachers, clerks and housewives and all took their work seriously and lifted mountains of work from the shoulders of harassed nurses. While there were several daughters of the idle rich among them, Penny was, perhaps, the most glamorous. The others, especially the younger ones, endeavored to emulate her in many ways. They copied her entirely natural coiffure regardless of its becomingness to their particular type. They copied her manner, her walk and the timbre of her voice. Some of the nurses found it comical but others thought it a step in the right direction because they considered Penny decidedly worth aping. She had always been quiet, gentle, low-voiced and unpretentious. But her shyness had worn off and she was discovering within herself an amazing capacity for living. For the first time in all her twenty years she found life completely satisfying, full, each day crowded with things to do—worth-while things—for others.

"You look like the cat that ate the canary, Stuart," Helen Reed jeered as they met briefly in the service room on the third floor. "I'm sure there are betraying feathers clinging to your chin, or is it merely my imagination? What's up? Your sweetie been given the DSO or something?"

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Penny smiled and shook her head. It no longer annoyed her that the others showed so much curiosity about her personal life. After all, they were curious about each other, too. Penny liked sharp-tongued Helen Reed. She had watched her bathing old Mrs. Verriter, soothing away her nervous twitching, calmly enduring her querulous faultfinding, patting her maternally after the job was finished and meticulously arranging on the bed-stand, within easy reach, all the paraphernalia dear to the old woman's heart. It was only after the job was done and she met with some of the other aides in the service or linen rooms that she went all out in her criticism of the whining "white man's burden," as she called Mrs. Verriter. But it was done without malice and no one took her too seriously. She was well liked by patients and nurses and Penny and she became friends.

Helen told very little about herself. She was the daughter of a chemist working in one of the munitions plants. Her mother was dead and Helen kept house for her father. The hours she gave to the hospital had been arranged so as not to conflict with her home-making. The fact that she had a brother and a sweetheart somewhere in the Pacific was not gleaned from her, but from her closest friend, Betty Hudson. And one day Helen didn't report for work. Betty was late and appeared with red eyes and tragedy written all over her pretty face. At the first opportunity, she unburdened herself to two other

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aides who were sorting linen with her. Penny came in just as she began her story.

" You know Neil's a bombardier. The plane he was in crashed or was shot down somewhere out there and hasn't been heard from since. This happened several weeks ago—nothing definite about it. And girls—the Pacific's an awfully big ocean. I was looking at it on the map just now and gosh! Imagine being cast adrift in that huge expanse of H₂O!" Tears splashed on the pile of fresh sheets she lifted to the shelves, and a sob escaped her.

" Neil's Helen's brother, isn't he?" Penny asked.

" Her only brother," Betty told her. " He was a peach, Stuart—a—honey ——" Her voice broke and she choked.

" But you must remember all the planes are equipped with rubber rafts," Penny reminded her. " Remember Rickenbacker? He and the men with him were picked up after twenty-one days afloat—when they were given up for lost."

" Oh, Eddie Rickenbacker!" Betty cried. " But he bears a charmed life, Stuart. Poor Neil has always had just about everything happen to him. I'm afraid," and she dabbed at her eyes with one of the towels she was sorting. " You see, Stuart, Neil and I were that way about each other although nobody knew it. Helen thought we hated each other because we were always scrapping; but we enjoyed fighting and now —"

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"A friend of mine," Penny began, and added hastily as she saw interest dawn in the other's eyes, "practically a brother—was lost for three weeks in the jungles of New Guinea and was reported missing by the War Department; but just a month or so afterward we received word he had been rescued. I never gave up and you must not."

"I remember that," Betty said, the tears gone. The other two girls drew nearer. "Wasn't it Doctor Ames, Stuart? Let's see, he was engaged to your cousin, wasn't he? She must have thought he was gone for keeps when she married that Alan Lowell. How did she take the news of his rescue?"

Here was the thing Penny hated. The discussion of her family affairs. She had meant only to help Betty—encourage her to hope, not to give out information about her relatives. Well, she had no one to blame but herself. Now she replied to the other's question.

"Yes, Louise felt sure he would never return. She and Alan Lowell have been friends for years —"

"Caught on the rebound, whatever that is," Betty said. "Well, she's a darned handsome woman and no one could blame him for grabbing the chance when it presented itself. But I bet a dollar when Doctor Ames hears about her ditching him he'll wish the head-hunters had got him, or something. But really, you can't blame your cousin —"

"No one is blaming her that I know of," Penny

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said shortly and left the three girls staring after her.
"No one except Mother and me," she told herself,
"and perhaps Uncle Stephen. Poor Bart!"

The war was coming closer. Miss Donaldson received word that her brother had been killed in action. Another of the aides was notified her fiance was wounded in Africa. Two more nurses left the hospital for undisclosed army bases and another group of aides finished their six weeks of classroom instruction and entered their probationary period. A little paler, a bit more compassionate but increasingly efficient, Miss Donaldson was the inspiration of the entire staff. As usual the hospital was full to capacity and nurses and doctors labored unceasingly to atone for the inroads the war had made on its staff. There were no vacations, and, miraculously, practically no grousing. Miss Williams and Doctor Hammond seemed to mellow under strain. Discipline was never better and yet very little was said about enforcing the few rather stringent rules governing the staff. Penny decided that if she was to enter a nurses' training class it would be right here in Good Samaritan even though Harwood Memorial offered greater inducements. She had come to love Good Samaritan and wanted to be associated with it.

As June advanced Penny's thoughts were more and more somewhere in the South Pacific with Nick Marshall. His sister Nora wrote her from time to time,

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giving bits of information she already possessed. There was nothing new—nothing definite about Nick's whereabouts and his letters became uncertain and at last ceased altogether. But Penny continued to write him long letters, filled with news of her life and activity at the hospital. And gradually there crept into her letters something of the love she felt for him. She begged him to take care of himself although she felt sure he would do nothing of the sort. Papers and magazines were full of pictures of flaming planes spiraling to earth or sea and she would close her eyes and shudder, seeing Nick at the controls, helpless, and the Pacific was so huge a place in which to be "lost.

"I'm acting almost as if I were already his wife," she told herself as she finished a letter to him, sealed and stamped it ready for mailing. "Perhaps he has changed his mind about loving me." But somehow she knew he had not.

Followed weeks of anxiety when no letter came from him. Penny was grateful for her hospital work and, like the rest of the staff, put more and more of herself into caring for the sick and injured.

Louise and Alan were still in Washington. Louise's enthusiasm for war work seemed to have petered out with her marriage to Alan Lowell. Word drifted back to Wellsport of her popularity as a hostess—of her amazing beauty and charm. In Wellsport, Mrs. Pendergast had taken over the work Louise had left

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and Penny discovered to her own amazement that she actually enjoyed helping at the Canteen. She had been nervous and shy at first, but soon recovered her poise. Why, any one of these boys might easily have been Nick and she and Nick always had fun.

"It's for you, darling," she said in her heart. "Perhaps someone is doing as much for you out there wherever you are."

She became increasingly surprised at her popularity and gave the entire credit to her work as a Nurse's Aide; but in her heart she knew it was partly due to the fact that Cousin Louise was absent.

Mrs. Lowell and Sarah were equally distressed that no further word had been received from Barton Ames since the announcement of his rescue. They watched Penny closely for signs of grief but the girl was apparently bearing up under the strain as she had after the report that he was missing. Sarah babied her, Maggie cooked her favorite food, her mother begged her to give up the hospital work and even Uncle Stephen looked anxious as he saw the increased pallor and the smudges of weariness beneath the girl's gray eyes that just now looked enormous in her small face.

And then one day there arrived a letter from him. The entire household took on a different atmosphere. Sarah carried the precious missive to Penny's room and eagerly awaited her arrival. Maggie planned a special dinner of all the girl's favorite dishes. Mrs.

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Lowell fussed with the table decorations as if for the admiration of special guests. Mr. Lowell spent the afternoon in the garden, bothering the man-of-all-work who was transplanting certain perennials and needed no advice from the boss but got it just the same.

Penny came home, and seeing no one about went directly to her room. She wanted a bath and a few minutes' complete rest before dinner. Sarah was there as usual.

"I got your bath all ready, Miss Penny," she announced, her voice excited. "I saw you coming and hustled to draw it for you."

Penny had caught sight of the letter placed conspicuously on her dressing table. Sarah's eyes were alight with happiness. She held out the letter. Penny took it and the glow that had kindled in her eyes at sight of the envelope slowly faded as she opened it. It wasn't from Nick. She scanned the closely written sheets then handed it to Sarah.

"Take it down to Mother, will you, Sarah?" she said. "She will be glad we heard from him. Have her read it to you if you like."

Sarah's chin sagged. What had happened? But she thought she understood when Mrs. Lowell read the letter to her and she found out it had been written by his nurse. He had evidently received Penny's letter in which she told him of being a Nurse's Aide and his comments were exceedingly tepid, she thought. But

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no doubt that was due to his inability to write himself. He spoke of the wonderful work the nurses at the base hospital were doing—of the hardships they endured and the sacrifices they were constantly making and the thought struck Sarah as it had Penny that he was writing it for his nurse's benefit. Penny had wondered who she was and if she was pretty and decided she probably was. Perhaps Bart would fall in love with her. It was quite possible. Patients usually fell in love with their nurses. Penny had smiled at the thought and was relieved to find the idea was not in the least displeasing to her. Sarah, however, flounced out of the library where Mrs. Lowell was and down to the kitchen where she unburdened herself to the cook, Maggie.

"The longer I live," she muttered in disgust, "the less I think of men. They're dumb—every last one of 'em—and if I had that Doctor Bart here right now I'd box his ears and try to knock some sense into him. Oh, it ain't nothing special, Maggie," she explained as the cook paused in her dinner preparations to listen to the tirade. "It's just that prob'ly Doctor Bart's gone an' made a fool of hisself all over again. Soft in the noodle, that's what he is. Miss Penny's a sight too good for him."

She picked up a dish and slammed it down on the table. She was bitterly disappointed. She had never doubted for a moment that her beloved young mistress would marry Doctor Ames. But now she

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wasn't so sure. Drat this war—drat everything and everyone!

Stephen Lowell suppressed a smile as his wife re-read Bart's letter to him. "Imagine anything so utterly cool and unsentimental, Stephen!" she complained.

"But, my dear," her husband explained, "please remember he was dictating it to his nurse, probably a very pretty girl at that. How do you suppose he could be anything but cool when writing to another girl? Of course he was cool and impersonal—any young man would be, if he had any sense."

"He could at least have sent her his love. After all, he has known Penny all her life and ——"

"And what does Penny say about it, Adelaide?" he asked.

"Sarah said she looked stricken—those were her very words, Stephen. My poor darling! I'm terribly disappointed in Bart. How could he —— I think I shall go to her."

"Better not, my dear. If it's as you and Sarah insist, she will want to be alone for a while. Give her a chance to recover—if she needs it—which I doubt." But he added that last to himself.

JOHN MACFARLAND DEAN WAS BORN ON THE Fourth of July and Penny Stuart arrived at her grandfather's in time for the christening two days later. She could stay but a few hours but it was long enough to prove to her own satisfaction that Louella had made a place for herself in the hearts of her grandfather's household.

"I shall call him 'John,' Penny," Louella said. "Mac's father's name was John so that's why everyone called his son 'Mac' to distinguish them. There can be only one 'Mac' for me. He looks exactly like his daddy—little John does."

Penny laughed. "How can you tell? Why, he's just a little lump of fat with red hair and a lusty voice."

"That's what I mean," Louella explained. "Mac had red hair and could charm a bird off a tree. He had a grand voice, Penny."

"Fine. I'm glad you're here, young man," Penny said, folding the blanket more snugly about him. "He's a beautiful baby, Louella," she told the proud young mother. "Everyone in Good Samaritan will be anxious to hear about you both. I'm glad you're all right, my dear, and—happy?"

The girl's eyes clouded for a moment, then she smiled. "Yes," she said softly. "I'm happy. And

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you? You look thinner and very tired. Are they working you too hard at the hospital, Penny?"

Penny shook her head. "I thrive on hard work, Louella," she replied. "Don't worry about me."

Louella's eyes were tender as she gazed at the girl holding her son. She owed her so very much. She wanted her to be happy—to have everything her heart desired. "I wasn't going to mention it, but your Bart is all right, isn't he? And your cousin married someone else. Does it help, Penny?"

"Bart? Help?" Penny asked, a puzzled look in her eyes. "O-oh," she murmured, her face flushing. "Of course we are all glad that he is safe, Louella; but I guess I was crazy to think I ever loved him. I mean, except as a brother. He's years older than I and I suppose it was just a childish crush I had—dating from infancy, practically. I was an idiot to think it was anything else."

"How did you discover it wasn't that kind of love, Penny?" Louella asked, a roguish light in her eyes. "Is there someone else—someone who has taught you the difference?"

Penny blushed again and was saved from answering by the return of Mrs. Seeley. She took the baby from Penny's arms and laid him in his crib!

"I have lunch all ready, Miss Penny," she said. "I wish you could stay a while. You need a vacation, my dear. What is your ma thinking of to let you work all summer like this? She'll get a piece of

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my mind and of the old gentleman's too. It ain't right. Here we just get you where you're something more than skin and bone and a pair of eyes and she up and gets married again and forgets all about you. I don't like it at all." She laid an affectionate arm about the girl's slim shoulders and gave her a little hug. "We miss you, my dear, but if you must go—and your train leaves in less than an hour with not another one until tomorrow—you'd best eat that lunch."

Back in Women's Surgical, Penny found many new faces. She had come to know each patient while she was in the ward before; but the intervening months had changed the population. A few, however, remained. Mrs. Stanton was still here and would probably remain for several months longer. Her hip was slow in mending and was still in a cast after eight months. She had already had two operations on it and there was talk of another. She dreaded it as who wouldn't but declared she was game for anything if it would guarantee a complete cure.

She greeted Penny with enthusiasm that first morning of her return. "They're going to try again very soon now," she said. "I don't let myself think too much about it. When the time comes I'll just close my eyes and say my prayers." She repeated softly and reverently the old familiar prayer:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,

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I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take.
If I should live for other days,
I pray Thee, Lord, direct my ways.' "

She smiled. "Somehow, I go to sleep with perfect confidence. So far, both times I have awakened right here in my bed; but it would have been all right if I hadn't."

"Yes," Penny agreed, "it would have been—it will always be all right." And as Penny was making her bed with fresh linen, Mrs. Stanton told her all the news of the ward. How Miss Jacoby had married an old beau right after she left the hospital. The operation for gall stones had made a new woman of her. She used to be so sensitive and grouchy but after the operation she was sweet and really quite pretty. She was living on a farm over west of Wellsport and occasionally came in to see her. Mrs. Marsh had died right after Easter. It was the strangest thing about the flowers that came to her every week—lovely hothouse flowers and no one ever knew who sent them. The old lady used to weave long, romantic tales about them—about her husband who had been dead for many years and of his cousin who had been more than half in love with her and how she used to tease her steady, stay-at-home Henry about him. But sometimes she wondered if perhaps they came from the church she used to attend and

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would immediately lose interest in them. Usually, however, she had a happier tale to tell them, about the possible donor of the flowers. With her death the flowers stopped so they must have come from someone who knew. Well, it had all been very mysterious and they had given the old lady a great deal of happiness as well as pleasure to the rest of the ward. Mrs. Stanton wished she could let whoever had done it know what she thought of it.

Penny felt a wave of pleasure that this little act of hers had helped one poor lonely soul over a trying time.

And poor Mrs. Verriter. Did Penny know she had suffered an embolism just as she was leaving the hospital? Poor old soul! She had dreaded being taken to her nephew's. She felt they didn't want her. And had Miss Penny seen Miss McClusky's engagement ring? She hadn't? It was lovely—get her to show it. Mrs. Stanton had seen a picture of the man and he was very good looking. His name was Rankin—Joel Rankin—and was in the service. They all loved Nurse McClusky.

On and on she went, relating bits of news regarding new patients and those Penny remembered when she was here before. Cheerful in spite of pain and discomfort. It was a joy to serve her.

Jolly Mrs. Oliver was going to the solarium for the first time since her goiter operation and was happy as a lark at the prospect. Penny got her ready

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for the trip to the roof with its gay awnings, huge shrubs and bright flowers; where the breeze swept in from the lake and brought a breath of coolness even on the hottest days. Three other patients were to make the trip and Helen Reed who was working with Penny was to take them into the elevator after Penny prepared them for the journey. The women were as excited as if they were bound on a picnic and the girls enjoyed getting them ready.

Two women were leaving the hospital that afternoon and had to be helped with their dressing and prevented from overdoing in their excitement at the thought of going home. Mrs. Ryan was making her first trip to the X-ray room and was frightened at the prospect. Penny soothed her fears and went with her for the ordeal.

"Why, they ain't nothin' to it," the woman said in surprise and, Penny felt sure, more than a little disappointment. "I thought I'd be seein' me whole insides spread right out in public an' I didn't fancy it, though I did think it might have been intrustin'. I thought mebbe I'd see just where that safety pin I swallered when I was a kid went to. It takes a pitcher, don't it, Nurse?"

"Yes, it takes a picture, Mrs. Ryan," Penny explained. "It shows the conditions that exist in the parts of the body the surgeon and doctor are interested in."

"Well, then I want some of 'em finished up." She

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laughed impishly. "Now wouldn't it be cute if I sint one to me sister in th' Bronx an' told her it's me insides an' don't they look natchrul? I bet she'd have a fit. D'you s'pose mebbe they'll let me have a half a dozen of 'em?"

Penny explained the pictures were just for the hospital and that she didn't think there would be any for the patient. Mrs. Ryan was plainly disappointed but bore it with good grace. It was evident she had been disappointed many times before.

"It's th' first time I was ever in a hospital, Nurse," she told Penny as they returned to the ward. "I sort o' like it here. You girls are so pleasant, sort of—treat a body like they was comp'ny. Seems good when you ain't never been treated like comp'ny—not in yer whole life. I wish, though, I could be sure Pat'll git his meals reg'ler an' pack hisself a good dinner to take to th' shop ev'ry mornin'. Men are so helpless, ain't they, deary?"

"You probably spoil him, Mrs. Ryan," Penny told her and the little Irish woman laughed and agreed that she guessed she did all right, but then, Pat was worth spoiling. He was a good man.

Later that morning Doctor Andrews followed his chief into the ward and behind Doctor Hammond's broad back wriggled his fingers at Penny, his hands close to his ears. Ruth McClusky's eyes widened at the byplay and she glared severely at the young man who regarded her with an innocent stare. Penny was

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annoyed to feel herself blushing. She fled to the service room where Helen Reed followed her.

"Sa-ay!" that young lady exclaimed. "What goes on here? Don't tell me you and the blond Kildare are that way about each other, Stuart! You slay me!"

"Don't be silly," Penny retorted crossly. "I scarcely know the man—that is," she amended truthfully, "he has given me a lift home from the hospital once or twice. But that's all."

"I see," Reed said skeptically. "Now I can understand why the lug is completely oblivious to the vast quantities of pulchritude continually being paraded before him. The man's purblind. How long has this been going on, fellow aide?"

"I wish you wouldn't imagine things, Reed," Penny said, glancing through a crack in the door to see if the two doctors had departed. They hadn't and she turned back to Helen Reed. "I assure you there is absolutely nothing between Doctor Andrews and me—nothing at all."

"Methinks the lady doth protest overmuch," Helen teased and Penny frowned then laughed ruefully, knowing well that the more she denied the charge the more she would have to submit to teasing.

"Oh, you and your romancing!" she cried. "Just because you happen to be in love, you have love on the brain," she jibed and was rewarded by the look of embarrassment on the other's face.

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"In love? Me? What made you say that, Stuart?" she demanded.

"Well," Penny temporized, "haven't we all a sentimental interest in someone in uniform, Reed? Of course we have. And anyone as attractive as you are must have."

"Then you haven't heard—you only surmise?" she stammered.

"But it's true, isn't it?" Penny insisted.

Helen Reed nodded and bit her lip. "I'll murder you if you tell anyone," she said fiercely. "His family has another girl picked out for him. They don't know about me—for sure. Look!" She reached inside her blouse and pulled out a slender gold chain from which hung a plain gold wedding ring.

"Married!" gasped Penny in surprise. "When?"

"A couple of months ago—on his last furlough—just before he went overseas. No one knows it. Certainly not his people. If he doesn't come back they never will. I despise them all," she said fiercely. "They're snobs—social climbers—phonies!"

"Doesn't your father know either?" Penny asked.

"Absolutely not. He would insist that I make a public announcement of it if he did and I simply will not. It's something that's between Dave and me. Dad thinks we're just fond of each other and doesn't approve of even that, knowing how Dave's people would feel about it. You see, Stuart," the girl went on and Penny felt sure she was relieved to talk about

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it to someone, "Dad works for his father, Cyrus Whittaker, who owns the Cordage Factory, just now making munitions. He's the chemist. But Dad's worth a dozen of old Cy even with his old woman thrown in and his two slinky daughters. Dave's the only one in the family worth the powder to blow him up. And he's a prince!"

"I'm sure he is," Penny assured her sincerely. "Do you know where he is, Reed? Do you hear from him regularly?"

"Heavens, no!" she cried. "It's weeks since I heard from him. At first I used to worry a lot but lately I've begun to be more philosophical. You see, Dave's on a destroyer and so far he's been lucky. I'm hoping he will continue to be. I've given enough to this war —"

"You've had no word from your brother?"

Helen shook her head, her lips pressed firmly together as if to prevent their trembling. "It's five weeks now, Stuart, and Dad and I have given him up."

"Hist!" came sibilantly from the slightly open door. "On your toes, gals. The chief departs but her nibs approaches."

"The lad has his points," Helen Reed murmured as the two aides returned to the ward. Penny said nothing. She hoped Reed would keep her own counsel. Only Ruth McClusky was in sight. She eyed Penny quizzically. Penny shook her head and went

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on with the business of stripping the bed from which a patient had recently been discharged.

On her way home that afternoon Penny found herself thinking of Helen Reed and the tremendous secret she was carrying in her heart. What a pity that families were so often lacking in understanding and a sense of fair play. Surely any family should be glad to welcome a girl like Helen Reed into its midst. Penny didn't know much about the Whittakers. She had met the girls at the Canteen and thought them rather attractive. She had never even seen the parents. She hoped with all her heart David would come home from the war and that he and Helen would find happiness together.

As for herself, she hoped and prayed for Nick Marshall's safety. Every morning she awoke to a longing that she would receive a letter before the day was over. As she walked home from the hospital this afternoon she wondered if, perhaps, a letter had come from him. She went directly to her room after greeting her mother, for if a letter had come it would be there. Sarah would see to that.

A letter had come but it was from Bart, this time written in his own distinctive hand. Sarah handled it cautiously. Mrs. Lowell examined the envelope hopefully and once again they watched Penny as she brought it downstairs for them to read. Sarah grunted and went back to the kitchen, not even waiting for Mrs. Lowell to read it aloud. Uncle Stephen

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was not yet home so Penny's mother read it to herself. To her, it still sounded rather forced and lacking in affection such as she had anticipated. She wondered what had happened and yet, perhaps, this was a sample of all his letters to Penny. She didn't know. She sighed. It was hard for her to give up the idea of Bart as a husband for Penny. Stephen had insisted it would never be and it looked as if he were right.

"Bart's evidently recovering from his terrible experience, Mother," Penny said conversationally when they were seated at dinner some time later.

Sarah lingered for a moment and Penny went on for her benefit. "Just think of all the wonderful tales he'll have to tell his children and grandchildren."

Sarah sniffed and went out. Uncle Stephen laughed and his wife looked at him curiously. His eyes twinkled into Penny's and the girl suppressed a giggle.

"What's so funny?" Penny's mother demanded, aggrieved.

"Nothing, only Penny seems to be looking ahead," her husband explained.

"Looking ahead? What do you mean?"

"We were just teasing Sarah, Mother," Penny said. "Wild horses couldn't make her ask what was in Bart's last letter and yet she's dying to know. Why don't you read it to her, darling? You know she adores Bart."

"I don't think she does any more, Penny," her

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mother mused, only half aloud. "I think she is disappointed in him." She laughed softly. "She told me she considered his last letter—the one he dictated to his nurse—decidedly tepid. That was her word—'tepid.' I don't know what she expected."

"Flaming passion, no doubt," Uncle Stephen offered and grinned wickedly at Penny.

"I don't know why you should say that, Stephen," bridled his wife defensively. "Remember it was Louise to whom he was engaged—not Penny."

"I'm not at all apt to forget he was engaged to Louise," her husband said soberly. "I wish to heaven he was still engaged to her and that she wasn't my son's wife."

"Forget it, Uncle Stephen," Penny advised. "After all, it's their life. You married whom you pleased, didn't you? I wonder why families so often get difficult when a son or daughter decides to pick his own mate. After all, this isn't China or India or even Mexico. Here in America every man and woman has the right to choose for himself the person with whom he wants to spend the rest of his life. And it really shouldn't be anyone else's business."

"Check," Uncle Stephen said heartily. "I stand properly rebuked. Well, I haven't done any meddling since the wedding and from now on I intend to try to make the best of things. There, am I re-established in your good graces, my dear?"

"I'm sorry, Uncle Stephen," the girl said con-

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tritely. "I wasn't thinking of you, at least not much. I was thinking of a girl I know who is secretly married to a man whose family don't approve of her and are planning on marrying him to a girl of their own choosing. It's really too bad because she is wonderful. They should consider themselves fortunate in having her a member of the family."

"Oh, dear," her mother sighed, "I do hope you won't feel it your duty to try to patch things up there, Penny. It seems to me you have had far too much publicity as it is. I don't think I could endure any more. Anyway, I don't approve of secret marriages—no matter how wonderful this girl you speak of may be. Please, darling, don't you get involved in any family squabble."

"Now, Mother, there isn't the least chance of my becoming involved, as you say. I don't know any of them but the girl and she wants nothing to do with his family."

"Just the same," her mother repeated stubbornly, "I don't approve of secret marriages."

"Nor I," Uncle Stephen agreed.

"Well," Penny laughed, "that makes it unanimous. Althought I can see where it might be fun. An awful lot are doing it these days."

It was while they were still at dinner that the telephone summoned Sarah from the kitchen where she was getting the dessert ready for serving. She left grudgingly to answer it and came to the dining-room

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door to announce that some man wanted to talk to Miss Penny. Penny rose immediately.

"Who is it, Sarah?" she asked as she left the room.

"I didn't ask," the maid answered shortly and Penny patted her shoulder placatingly.

"Don't you be cross with me, Sarah Bates," she warned. "I won't have it. You hear? This is Penny Stuart speaking," she said into the transmitter. "O-oh, it's you, Doctor Andrews. No-o. I hardly think so, Doctor—Andy," she laughed softly as she caught a glimpse of Sarah's disapproving face in the kitchen door. "Well, I might. What time? All right, for a little while; but I must not be late, you know. Perfect, Andy," she added and replaced the instrument in its cradle. Sarah had vanished from the kitchen door and Penny returned to the table, a roguish smile still on her lips.

Sarah brought in the dessert. Her mouth was grim and she refused to meet Penny's eyes. She set the girl's plate before her and marched from the room, her back stiff and her entire person expressing profound disapproval.

"What's the matter with Sarah?" Stephen Lowell asked, eyeing his stepdaughter quizzically.

Penny shook her head. "Her world's out of joint just at present, I imagine," she said, dipping into her iced pudding. "She gets these spells occasionally. Dear, funny old Sarah! She forgets I'm no longer a

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child to be managed as she thinks proper. I suppose it's mean to tease her but sometimes the temptation is too strong to resist."

"Have you been teasing her?" her mother asked. Something was going on that was completely beyond her humorless comprehension. She wished they wouldn't talk in riddles. Now Penny smiled at her and replied:

"In a way, I suppose I have," which didn't clarify things in the least.

Sarah let Doctor Andrews in when he rang the bell some time later and she examined the young man with critical, unfriendly eyes. He gave her what he had always considered his most disarming smile but found it made no impression whatsoever on the dour maid. She ushered him into the drawing-room just as Penny ran down the stairs.

"Hello, Andy!" she greeted him and slipped her hand through Sarah's stiff arm.

"Sarah," she smiled, "I want you to know a friend of mine, Doctor Andrews, who is interning at Good Samaritan."

Sarah made a stiff bow that was half curtsey and said nothing. The young man extended his hand and after wiping hers on her immaculate apron Sarah put hers into it. The frozen look on her face melted a little at his warm handclasp.

"Penny has told me how good you have always

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been to her, Sarah," he said cordially. "I'm glad to know you."

Sarah bowed again but remained silent as she withdrew. Penny made a little face and led the way to the library where her mother and Uncle Stephen were playing cribbage. Here again the young man felt himself being subjected to subtle inspection although the greeting of both Penny's mother and her stepfather was cordial if a bit curious.

It was unusual for Penny to invite strange young men to the house. Her male callers had, up to now, been sons of parents with whom her mother was friendly and whose background could be vouched for, and even those calls had been infrequent because Penny had never been what was known as a social success. So Mrs. Lowell patted the seat of a chair near her and invited the young man to sit down and tell her about himself.

She discovered that his father was a metropolitan clergyman and his mother the daughter of a senator. This was not at all bad, her manner said quite plainly, and she beamed maternally on the caller. Uncle Stephen grinned at Penny who smiled in answer. Doctor Andrews caught the exchange of signals and grinned at them both.

"Are you going out tonight, Penny?" her mother asked, somewhat irked by the amused glances.

"To the movies, Mother. I haven't been in ages."

"Let's start, shall we, Penny?" the young man

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suggested. "We should be just about in time for the feature picture if we go right now."

"It's such a wonderful evening, let's walk, Andy. It isn't far to the neighborhood theater on Main—three blocks over."

They went out and Penny's mother demanded as the front door closed behind them: "Now tell me why you were all so amused. What happened that I didn't see—or hear?"

"Not a thing, my dear," her husband said and concentrated on his game. "He seems a very fine young man. I shall be glad if Penny finds means of relaxation entirely outside her war effort. Oh, I know she dances and no doubt finds a certain amount of amusement at the Canteen, but it costs her something in time and effort. Now a date like this one tonight demands nothing from her and she can relax and enjoy herself without the least effort. Don't you agree?"

Mrs. Lowell's eyes were vague. Her husband doubted if she had been listening to his discourse. Now she said slowly:

"I'm glad he's of good family, Stephen. So many of the young doctors who intern at these upstate hospitals are quite impossible. I remember hearing Doctor Andrews preach once while I was in New York. A most distinguished man. I never met his mother, though Aunt Mildred must know her. I shall write her tomorrow and find out all about the family.

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I wonder why he came to Wellsport, Stephen, and why he isn't in uniform? Do you have any idea?"

Mr. Lowell smiled and shook his head. "Not the faintest, my dear. More than likely he has been deferred until he finishes his internship here at the hospital. Probably he'll be leaving in a few months or a year."

"Then I hope Penny isn't going to let herself get serious about him, Stephen," his wife exclaimed firmly. "I don't want her hurt again."

"There you go," her husband laughed. "Penny is quite capable of taking care of herself, Adelaide. I doubt very much if this young man will get very far with her. He isn't the one."

"You make me angry, Stephen Lowell, with your cryptic remarks and your superior airs. How do you know so much? Has Penny confided in you—things she has kept from her own mother?" There were tears in her eyes and the man got up and took the chair recently vacated by the young interne.

"Don't be an idiot, darling," he chided, his arm about her slim waist. "I'm just guessing. Didn't you notice the complete lack of excitement in our girl's manner? If she had been the least little bit in love with the young man it would have been apparent, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose so," Penny's mother conceded, somewhat mollified and wiping her eyes on the square of immaculate linen he took from his pocket. "But it

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does annoy me when you seem to know Penny better than I, her own mother, know her."

"Don't be jealous, Adelaide," Stephen Lowell urged softly. "Remember I love Penny. If she were my own flesh and blood I couldn't care more."

"And she loves you, Stephen. I'm so glad."

Completely unaware of the controversy being waged in the brick house on Chestnut Place, Penny and Doctor Andrews walked the short distance to the neighborhood theater and found seats well toward the rear. If Ross Andrews was keenly aware of the girl's nearness, Penny was completely unconscious of his. In fancy she was soaring above the clouds in one of the planes shown on the screen and Nick Marshall was at the controls. She closed her eyes.

"Nick, Nick!" she whispered, and didn't know it was audible to the man beside her until he pressed the hands folded in her lap.

TWO DAYS LATER, PENNY WAS ASKED TO TAKE A short turn on night duty and much against the wishes of her mother and Sarah Bates, she accepted. It was a little strange at first but she soon grew accustomed to turning night into day and vice versa. Her hours were from eleven to six with two hours off during that period for lunch and relaxation. Coffee and sandwiches were served to the staff at that time and Penny enjoyed listening to the nurses discuss particular cases and she came to know them better and admire them for the uncomplaining way they shouldered their unusually heavy responsibilities. There were a number of student nurses on night duty with Penny the only aide. She thought the work much easier except that it seemed to her more people died during the hours between midnight and sunrise.

Now, however, she had grown accustomed to meeting death and it held few terrors for her. So often death meant welcome release from unbearable pain and suffering. It was only when the victim was young with a lifetime before him that she rebelled at the apparent needless waste. Why couldn't something have been done? But she was glad when the trick ended and she could return to day work.

On her last night—to the relief of her family—she prepared almost reluctantly for her work at the hos-

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pital. It had been a close hot day and the night was dark and moonless—the air heavy with the perfume of a million growing things. Almost in silence she and Uncle Stephen walked the short mile to the hospital. As he left her at the door he looked up at the sky.

"We'll have a storm before many hours, Penny. Shall I drive over for you in the morning? There's still a little gas in the car."

"Don't bother," the girl said. "I have a raincoat and umbrella here. Save the gas for an emergency, Uncle Stephen. Thanks, just the same. You're sweet."

She went in. It was all very quiet. Perhaps it was the approaching storm or perhaps it was because she was extra tired that made her so depressed. She felt as if a pall were hanging over her that try as she would she couldn't shake off. She had been in Pediatrics a week now and was shocked anew each time she looked at Teddy Thorpe. Last night the boy had been wakeful in spite of the sedative given him and had begged her to stay with him. He had failed greatly since the winter and Penny knew he was dying.

At three in the morning Teddy suffered his second heart attack and died in spite of all the house physician and nurse could do. The boy clung to Penny's hand as if he drew strength and courage from it, and almost at the very last announced between gasps that he and his ray gun had finally

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brought the enemy to his knees. His face was ashen, his lips blue but his eyes were feverishly bright as he attempted to take aim for a last triumphant shot. But the effort was too much. His puny arms refused to obey his dauntless spirit and with a little whimpering sigh the light faded from his eyes and Doctor Morris got slowly and wearily to his feet.

"He lived longer than I expected he would," he told them as he prepared to leave the ward in which children slept soundly quite unaware of the Dark Angel who had paid them a visit and taken with him one of their number. Penny prepared the thin, wasted body for removal from the room, stripped and washed the bed, springs, stand and chair that stood close by so that when morning came there should be no reminder of last night's hasty departure.

However, the bed was not to remain long without an occupant. Before Penny left for home at six o'clock, another small boy was sleeping there, one arm strapped to his plump body and his head almost completely covered by bandages. It developed that Jimmy Montgomery, who had arrived at the hospital at about the time Teddy Thorpe was starting on his last adventure, was also an intrepid soul, having built a wonderful room in a huge old apple tree that stood not far from the family abode. Penny heard the story of his accident partly from his worried parents and partly from the boy himself. Jimmy was nine, sometimes a commando, sometimes a guerrilla

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and sometimes Tarzan and it was while emulating the last that he came to grief.

His mother had repeatedly warned him against spending a night in his tree house and all would have been well if he had listened to her wise counsel. But one still hot night, after the family was safely in bed and asleep, Jimmy felt a compelling desire to visit the house of his own building and spend the remainder of the night in its cool, leafy shelter. He crept down the back stairs, let himself out of the kitchen door, crossed the dark but quite familiar yard and by way of the rickety ladder he had made from odd scraps of wood, mounted to his roost. He was elated at his success and stretched out on the floor and promptly went back to sleep. He awoke hours later to find the old tree swaying in the wind. Never had he seen such inky blackness as now surrounded him. Back of the barn an owl hooted and Jimmy shivered. It had grown suddenly and unaccountably cold. Somewhere up the road a dog howled forlornly and the boards of the little room creaked as the tree was buffeted by the gale. A long, vivid fork of lightning split the sky and thunder crackled menacingly.

The boy felt about for his flashlight but his fingers encountered nothing but rough splintery wood. He crept to the door, deciding to return to his warm, comfortable bed at home. His feet, dangling through the opening, felt for the ladder. It was gone and

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everything was very black down below. The tree creaked and swayed, thunder crashed, lightning flared and in the sudden glare the ground seemed a mile away. He was hanging there, too far from the tree's trunk to get his legs around it and lacking strength to pull himself back to his roost. From the house came the sound of a window being slammed shut. He tried to call but his voice died in his throat. Another crash of thunder and a blinding flash of lightning and either Jimmy's hands lost their grip or the board to which he clung gave way and he dropped to the ground.

In the house, his mother was running from room to room closing windows against the sudden downpour. In her son's room she discovered his empty bed and roused her husband. Together they went out into the storm, calling the boy's name. There was no response. They reached the apple tree to find young Jimmy unconscious beneath it, with broken branches and pieces of rotted boards scattered about. His father carried him into the house and summoned the family doctor who advised hospitalization.

"Huh! Whyn't yuh jump, yuh—yuh big baby!" the boy in the next bed demanded after the story had been repeated some half dozen or more times. This particular time for the benefit of Penny. She was back on days and this morning was bathing as much as she could of Jimmy's battered body.

"I didn't want to, that's why," the boy answered

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his tormentor. "How'd I know what was down there? Anyway, I did sort o' jump there at the last. I did, too," as the other jeered.

"If yuh jumped, why'd yuh git all smashed up?"

"I can explain that," Penny said, hoping to ease the situation. "You see, Jimmy's ladder had been blown down by the wind and been pretty well smashed in the process and when Jimmy dropped to the ground it was into that splintered ladder together with a lot of broken branches from the tree. After all, Tommy, Jimmy isn't a very big boy, remember—not nearly as big as you are. You're twelve, you know."

"Sure," Tommy agreed complacently. "I'm lots bigger but just the same I bet when I was nine I could have jumped —"

"Maybe you could but you see, Jimmy was probably half asleep and that makes all the difference, doesn't it?"

"I guess so," Tommy conceded reluctantly and Jimmy's protruding lip went back to normal. But Penny noticed that he didn't boast any more about his exploit when he spent part of the night in his tree house. Bryan felt that was something for which to be grateful because she was fed up with the wild tale that grew and grew out of all proportions each time Jimmy related it.

"I bet a dollar he never spends another night there," the nurse said to Penny some time after. "If

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ever I saw two scared people, that youngster's parents—well, they were them. He's the only boy and no doubt has been thoroughly spoiled. I wonder if those teeth he lost were his permanent ones or if they were just baby teeth. Kind of cute the way he talks, isn't it?"

Penny nodded, her thoughts wandering. Weeks had elapsed since Nick Marshall's last letter. If only she knew he was all right. It was the uncertainty that was so awful.

The nurse's gaze was curious. Stuart had something on her mind. Not another mystery, she hoped. "Donaldson left word you were to remain here for lunch, Stuart," she said, wondering at the white, stricken look on the girl's face. "It's quite permissible as long as you're staying on this afternoon. No sense in your going out to eat."

"Oh, I can go over to the drug store for a sandwich and a glass of milk," Penny replied. "Anyway, I need the walk, Bryan—I need to get away for a few minutes—if you don't mind."

"Bad news, Stuart?" the nurse asked sympathetically. She was glad her only brother was a farmer—just now definitely essential to the war effort. Her father simply could not run that big farm alone. Sometimes she even considered the advisability of quitting the hospital and going out to Kansas to help them. She gazed at Penny with something like envy. It must be wonderful to care for a man as this lovely

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girl apparently cared for this Nick. But she murmured "I'm sorry," more because it was something to say than because she actually felt sorrow.

"No news at all," Penny replied—"that's what's getting me down."

"But no news is supposed to be good news," Bryan reminded her. She shook her head. "This isn't like you—"

Penny's look was bleak as she acknowledged the other's indictment. "It isn't," she muttered as she tossed her cap on the table and hurried down the corridor. At the elevator she turned. "I'll be back in half an hour, Bryan," she promised and the descending elevator hid her from the nurse's view.

"Poor kid!" Bryan murmured to herself as she went back to her charts. "I wonder if we've been working her too hard just because she's willing and efficient—"

Penny was back before the half hour was up and from some unknown source had apparently received renewed strength and serenity of spirit. Throughout the afternoon she was her old self, amusing the children, caring for their many needs, assisting Bryan, being the super-aide she had been ever since she entered Good Samaritan Hospital.

From time to time Bryan eyed her with a mixture of awe and curiosity. Just what was it that made Penny Stuart different? That lifted her above the

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others? And at last she thought she knew the answer. It was her complete selflessness—her willingness to sacrifice her own interests to the welfare of others. Nurse's Aide? Stuart had accepted the term—was living the title rôle, literally. She was everything the name implied. Bryan's tired eyes rested for a moment on the busy girl and she smiled.

"God bless you, Penny Stuart," she whispered as she laid aside another chart. "I hope you get good news soon—you've earned it."

In spite of her valiant effort to remain serene and unworried, Penny walked home that evening in a mood unaccountably depressed. She was tired both physically and emotionally. Perhaps, as her mother thought, she had been trying to do too much. But the girl knew it wasn't that—it wasn't work that was sapping her strength and stretching her nerves to the breaking point. It was worry—fear—this not knowing about Nick—if he was alive, dead, or what was, it seemed to her, worse—missing. She walked along the busy street, scarcely seeing her fellow pedestrians and barely missed being run down by a truck that swung around a corner to beat the light which was about to change. If a hand hadn't reached out and caught her back Penny Stuart would have been riding back to the hospital in an ambulance. As it was, she stared dazedly at the man who had probably

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saved her from serious injury or death and thanked him rather breathlessly.

"Wool gathering?" her rescuer asked gravely; then noting the blue uniform with the Red Cross on sleeve and bib, he said more gently: "Pretty tired, I suppose? Traffic is heavy at this time of day, young lady, so you'd better keep your mind on preserving your life."

"I'm sorry," Penny replied ruefully. "I am pretty tired; but my thoughts were a thousand miles away. I'm grateful to you."

"Don't mention it," the man said as the light changed. "But watch your step in the future if you want to be able to welcome your soldier back from the wars." He smiled as he waved good-bye and turned the corner.

How had that man known she was thinking of Nick? Was it written in her face? But, of course, just now nearly everyone's thoughts were overseas with the men in the service. His guess was bound to be somewhere near accurate. But for the rest of the way home Penny obeyed the traffic signals.

She entered the house to the sound of the telephone ringing in the library. Sarah came from the kitchen and Uncle Stephen appeared in the upper hall. Penny started upstairs, to be recalled, as the message was for her.

"It's for you, Miss Penny," Sarah told her in a

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stage whisper, adding: "You got two letters, too. They're upstairs in your room."

Penny automatically took the instrument from the maid's hand and only half heard the voice at the other end of the line ask if she had heard from Nick. It was Nora Marshall speaking and her voice was vibrant with relief and happiness.

"I just got in, Nora," Penny told her. "I haven't had time to see whether there is any mail for me or not."

"Of course there is, and I'll ring off now and you call me later. Mother's keen to know if he told you anything more than he did us. 'Bye, darling.'

Penny ran up the long stairs, her feet scarcely touching the treads. Gone were her weariness and depression of a moment before. Why, everything was wonderful—perfect. As usual, Sarah had preceded her and stood close to the dressing table on which the two letters rested. For a moment Penny's heart failed. The one on top was from Bart and she shoved it aside to pick up the other. Sarah's eyes widened in amazement as Penny devoured the contents of the second letter. She appeared quite unaware of the maid's presence. Her eyes glowed with excitement and she held the letter close to her breast after she finished reading.

"Nick—Nick!" she whispered, eyes closed and face lifted in an attitude of thanksgiving. "Darling!"

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" Sarah muttered and

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slipped from the room. She threw a glance over her shoulder at the absorbed girl. Doctor Bart's letter remained unopened on the table while Penny stood with rapt face staring into space. Sarah softly closed the door and went downstairs. Mrs. Lowell called to her as she passed the library door.

"Did Penny get her letters all right, Sarah?" she asked unnecessarily. "Is she pleased?"

"She's in a trance, Mrs. Lowell," the maid said, shaking her head in bewilderment. "You know something, ma'am? That girl's in love with the wrong man. Yes ma'am—it ain't Doctor Bart at all—it's that other fellow—that Nick Marshall. And we been barking up the wrong tree all this time. Can you beat that, Mrs. Lowell? I declare I'm completely flabbergasted. I am that."

"Are you sure, Sarah? What makes you think so? Of course she and the Marshall children played together while Penny was up at Father's, but—what do you make of it, Stephen?" she asked of her husband who had lowered his paper to listen.

"It's quite apparent, isn't it?" her husband said mildly. "After all, Nick Marshall is nearer her own age and from what I saw of the boy while he was here before he went to the coast I feel sure he's the right man for our girl. It's certain he thought so at the time. But I wouldn't press her, my dear. Better let her do any announcing there is to be done."

"There you go again, Stephen," his wife com-

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plained. "If you saw all this last fall why on earth didn't you say something about it? Why let me keep on worrying about Bart Ames?"

"Why, my dear," the man said placatingly, "after all, it was not my affair and I suspected at the time that Penny didn't know her own mind. It's only lately I have been sure."

Mrs. Lowell sighed in exasperation. Her husband laughed indulgently. Sarah had gone back to the kitchen to help Maggie with dinner and upstairs in her room Penny was talking on the extension telephone.

"He's fine, Nora," she sang into the transmitter. "What did he tell you?" She listened while Nora read the letter they had received from her brother. And Penny read portions of her letter in return, omitting such information as she felt sure Nick desired kept from his family. Nora had received letters from Rusty and the voices of the two girls glowed with happiness as they talked. And that happiness was transmitted to the rest of the household. Penny sang softly as she dressed for dinner. Her gray eyes shone and a lovely color suffused her cheeks.

Nick had told his family nothing of being forced down on an uninhabited and practically unknown island—"not even a tiny speck on your map, darling," he had written in his letter to Penny. "There were five of us in the plane—on reconnaissance over"—here a portion of the letter was blocked

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out—" and we wondered how we were ever to get away. We were out of gas and had food enough for barely a week. Nothing but the sea for miles and miles. Believe me I felt pretty small and insignificant. Don't ever refuse to believe in miracles or think they don't happen in these latter days. I say they do and here's why. We were on that island for twenty-eight days when the miracle happened. That night we had the worst storm I ever saw. We thought the plane was done for when a giant tree crashed down on us. We were all inside. The wind was terrific and the Pacific came right up to our front door, so to speak. Torrential rains fell and that in itself was a miracle for we were parched, having had little or no fresh water for days. Nothing ever tasted so good. We didn't mind the hunger so much—we did find some queer tasting greens and berries Joe Michaels declared were edible and we had fish every meal—don't let's have fish very often, darling, after we're married. I don't care for it." Penny smiled. That was just like Nick, going off at a tangent and delaying the big news. But he went on at once to tell how in the morning they examined the plane and found it practically unhurt although they still had no means of flying her. One of the men wandered about looking over the havoc made by the storm. Rocks were dislodged, trees uprooted and the whole little island was a sorry, desolate mess. Suddenly he saw something that looked like a metal drum, still half buried

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and evidently unearthed when the tree fell. His excited yell brought the others running.

"A Jap cache, Penny, believe it or not. It didn't take us long to refuel and get out of there. We have done little except eat, drink water and sleep since we got back to our base. We have all lost plenty of weight but I think none of us is the worse for the experience. In retrospect, the whole affair was fun; but the prospect before that gas was discovered was mighty grim."

He must have received several of her letters at once, even the one in which, frightened and depressed, she had cast aside her inhibitions and written him straight from her heart. His letter was full of his love and of the brave new world in which they were to build a life together.

It was some time later that Penny descended the stairs to meet her mother's questioning gaze. Her stepfather, apparently deep in the evening paper, somehow managed to feel the girl's glowing happiness. He refrained, however, from voicing his delight. Better let her mother be the first to hear whatever Penny wished to say.

With a little rush, the girl came to kneel beside her mother's chair. "He's safe!" she whispered. "Nick's safe, and—oh, Mother! I'm so happy! So very happy!"

"Are you, dear?" her mother asked, cupping the glowing face in her hand and examining with some

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anxiety the gray eyes raised to hers. "Then it was Nick all the time, darling?"

Penny shook her head. "Not quite all the time, Mother," she replied dreamily; "but it is now and forever."

THE END